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Call for Papers
The memory of culture, the culture of memory. Nation-building and citizenship in the past, present and future

The nation is not only an "imagined community" (Benedict Andersen), but also an "emotional community" (Barbara Rosenwein). In contrast to the specific nature of Old Regime-style celebrations, where traditional culture intersected with the dominant culture, often in forms ranging from conflict to compromise (Roger Chartier), national celebrations, for example, are instruments created by the state to educate the nation (such as the civic pedagogy), to express collective effusion in a controlled setting and to form an emotional bond between the citizens, as well as between the citizens and the authorities. The mechanisms set in motion allow the individual to be integrated into a community, in accordance with a vision in which the culture of the past (Pierre Nora) occupies a central place, by recalling the founding temporalities of the nation.

As a methodological orientation, the interest in the nation-building process signals the return of the event under the historians' magnifying glass, with the result of enabling the exploration of special temporalities, social links and explaining particular phenomena of the "civic enthusiasm" type (Nicolas Mariot). Moreover, emotions are primarily instruments of sociability (Barbara Rosenwein), which participate in the "political socialisation of individuals" (Emmanuel Fureix) and help us to understand the much deeper dynamics of politics.

Nation-building also includes the history of celebrations that have disappeared, all of which at one point in time represented a body of identity values based on a consensus between political power and citizens on the legitimising, pedagogical and civic functions of celebration (Rémi Dalisson). In this context, we can better understand why national celebrations should be associated with the concept of political culture (Serge Bernstein). It is one of the most effective spaces involving three essential elements: an identical reading of the past, a shared vision of the world, and a collective projection towards the future. However, as suggested, such celebrations are not the only means by which nation-building takes place. School textbooks, particularly of history, also contain the same cultural triad, with an identical reading of the past, a shared vision of the world, and a collective projection of the future. This is one of the key factors behind the assault on history operated by most of the radically changing political regimes.

Therefore, it should not be forgotten that nation- and citizen-building are objects of conflict between different political forces or regimes and an important stake for every power that needs legitimation. National holidays thus become "a formidable sounding board of national history that has adapted to all political regimes" (Rémi Dalisson), be they democratic, authoritarian, or totalitarian, regardless of their relationship with the population,. Having said this, the question of how modern nation-building has begun and diversified its educational tools becomes all the more practical in a 21st century which seems more and more divided, between what Karl Popper called open and closed societies. Thus, extending Gabrielle M. Spiegel´s inquiry (2007) regarding changes in historiography, we invite answers to an important question: how have nation-building and citizenship adapted themselves in their *long durée* history? The investigation may take into consideration a wide range of elements, from the Enlightenment travel memoirs, which, among other aspects, had profound formative, self-mirroring values and incentives for self and collective improvement, and the classical visual arts, to school textbooks, the cinema, the news, and the entirety of the audio-visual technologies and media of the pre- and post-COVID pandemic globalised world.

We welcome proposals for *Brukenthalia. Romanian Cultural History Review* until 15 February 2024, and after the selection has been made, we welcome the developed proposal until 7 May 2024. Traditionally, our journal encompasses a Miscellanea section, as well as one for reviews of scientific books, presentations of scientific conferences and international film festivals.
Proposals shall be submitted in accordance with our guidelines stated in the *Guide for Authors* to:
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A. STUDIES

THE HISTORICAL SOURCE AS FICTION

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Rezumat: Studiul de faţă analizează felul în care un document istoric real s-a transformat într-o ficţiune. Studiul de caz este articolul dietal din 1568 şi modul în care este prezentat pe Wikipedia în ediţiile română, maghiară, germană şi engleză. Pornind de la textul propriu-zis şi analiza acestuia, prezentul studiu investighează felul în care cele patru pagini Wikipedia transmit nu atât informaţii despre documentul istoric, ci a unor texte create ulterior de istoriografie şi publicistică.

Abstract: The paper deals with the issue of how a real historical document was transformed into a fictional one. The case study is the Diet article of 1568 and the way it is presented on Wikipedia, namely in the Romanian, Hungarian, German and English editions. Starting from the actual text and its analysis, the present article examines how the four Wikipedia pages convey not so much information about the historical document, but about texts subsequently created by historiography and publicists.

Cuvinte-cheie: izvor istoric, ficţiune, Dietă, Transilvania, politică religioasă.

Keywords: historical source, fiction, Diet, Transylvania, religious policy.

The current paper deals with a very often and yet very rarely discussed topic, that of fiction in historical writing. The role of fiction in historical reconstruction and narratives is a debated issue which arose to a new level due to Hayden White's seminal book.[1] But this paper deals only partially with the use of fiction in the attempted reconstruction of the past. Neither does it deal with the question of forged narrative or documentary sources which were debunked by historians and philologists.[2]

The source in question is authentic (or at least it was not proven otherwise), it was translated into German[3] from its Hungarian original even before it was published in the second volume of the series Monumenta Commitialia Historica.[4] The document was and is often employed in historical works[5] and has even its own Wikipedia-page in at least four languages: English,[6] German,[7] Hungarian[8]

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[1] Hayden White, *Auch Klio dichtet oder Die Fiktion des Faktischen. Studien zur Tropologie des historischen Diskurses*, (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1986), 1-3, 31, 64-67, 78, 131.

[2] About forgeries in Romanian and Hungarian historical culture, Ştefan S. Gorovei, „Postfaţă", in *Arhondologia Moldovei. Amintiri şi note contimporane. Boierii Moldovei*, eds. Rodica Rotariu, Mircea Anghelescu, Ştefan Gorovei, Costandin Sion, (Bucureşti: Minerva, 1973), 337-338; Lucian Boia, *Istorie şi mit în conştiinţa românească* (Bucureşti: Humanitas, 2017), 100-102; Karácsonyi János, *A hamis, hibáskeltű és keltezetlen oklevelek jegyzéke 1400-ig*, (Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, 1902), 1-41; Szádeczky Lajos, *A csíki székely krónika*, (Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, 1905); Jakó Zsigmond, „A torockói legenda születése és kritikája", in Jakó Zsigmond, *Könyv, írás, értelmiség. Tanulmányok Erdély történelméhez* (Bukarest: Kriterion, 1976), 62-79; Hermann Gusztáv Mihály, *Az eltérített múlt. Oklevél- és krónikahamisítások a székelyek történetéhez*, (Csíkszereda: Pro-Print, 2007), 15-29; Nagy Levente, *Lehetséges küldetés? Hitek és tévhitek a román reformáció körül*, (Budapest: ELTE Eötvös Kiadó, 2013), 91-99; about the political consequences of the forgeries, Hermann, *Az eltérített múlt*, 27-61.

[3] Georg Daniel Teutsch, *Urkundenbuch der Evangelischen Landeskirche A.B. in Siebenbürgen*, I (Hermannstadt, 1862), 101-102.

[4] *Monumenta Commitialia Historica = Erdélyi Országgyűlési Emlékek* (EOE), ed. Szilágyi Sándor (Budapest, 1875-1898), vol. II (1556-1576), Budapest, 1876; also available online: https://library.hungaricana.hu/hu/view/MonHunHist_3_Comitialia_B_Er_02_1556-1576/?pg=0&layout=s, https://eda.eme.ro/items/d092b29b-5527-4dc3-9707-5bddcbd64ca2, 343.

[5] Gábor Sipos made a sarcastic summary of the literature concerning this issue: "Transylvania is the land of classical religious freedom, after the Diet held in Turda in January 1568 declared the free practice of the four recepted religions - we all know this historical and journalistic commonplace all too well. Basically, this statement is correct, only it did not happen there and

and Romanian.[9] Since 2013 the English translation of the document as part of an article about the religious laws of Transylvania 1568-1571 is available online.[10]

The text of the historical document, known as the Decree/Edict of Tolerance, reads as follows: "According to agreements reached at previous sittings of the Diet between His Majesty and the people of his realm concerning matters of religion, it is once again confirmed by this present sitting (session) that pastors shall be free to preach and teach the Gospel wherever they may be and according to their own interpretation. If a parish chooses to accept this interpretation, well and good; if not, the parish shall not be forced to accept it against its will and shall be free to insist upon the maintenance of a preacher whose teachings suit its requirements. Following former constitutions, none of the superintendents, nor any other person shall have the right to offend a pastor or abuse anyone on the basis of his religion, nor shall anyone be threatened with imprisonment or removal from office for his preaching. Faith is a gift of God received through hearing, the vehicle of God's word."[11]

This document is a resolution of the Transylvanian Diet from January 1568. It is the last entry in the diary of the sessions.[12] The order in the diary should not be overinterpreted,[13] but corroborated with other sources it might give us a clue about the real importance of the resolution and whether it was or not a decree, an edict or a proclamation as it is often called.

The current paper is constituted of three parts:

1. The relation to the preliminary resolutions of the Diets concerning the religious policy
2. The kernel of the resolution rooted in the previous articles that the freedom of preaching will be confirmed, and only the congregations can decide about their theological outlook, while the freedom of the preachers will be assured even against their ecclesiastical (superintendents) and political superiors.
3. The article closes with the theological arguments of the resolution.[14]

As beautiful as the text may sound, the resolution is rather disappointing. It lacks everything it should contain according to our knowledge which we got from scientific and popularizing literature about the principality of Transylvania: there are no confessions mentioned and the concepts of "received" and "tolerated" are missing.[15] But why are we looking for contents that do not exist? The answer unveils that this resolution is confused with the article of 1595: "Concerning the matter of religion, we decree on behalf of the country that the received religions, that is, Catholic, sive romana, Lutheran, Calvinist and Ariana, should everywhere be upheld with no restriction."?[16]

My work hypothesis states that the article from 1568 is not interesting for what it contains, but for what it should contain according to our beliefs. Is it therefore rather a projection screen for the

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not like this.", "Katolikus-református vita a Szilágyságban a 17. század elején", in *Báthory Gábor és kora*, eds. Klára Papp, Jeney-Tóth Annamária, Ulrich Attila (Debrecen: Debreceni Egyetemi Kiadó, 2009), 311.

[6]"Edict_of_Torda": https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edict_of_Torda.

[7]"Edikt_von_Torda": https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edikt_von_Torda.

[8]„Az_1568-as_tordai_törvény": https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vall%C3%A1sszabads%C3%A1g#Az_1568-as_tordai_t%C3%B6rv%C3%A9ny.

[9]„Edictul_de_la_Turda": https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edictul_de_la_Turda.

[10] Mihály Balázs, "Tolerant Country – Misunderstood Laws. Interpreting Sixteenth-Century Transylvanian Legislation Concerning Religio", *The Hungarian Historical Review*, 2013, Vol. 2, No. 1 (2013): 85-108, http://hunghist.org/index.php/83-articles/146-2013-1-balazs, 88-89.

[11] Balázs, "Tolerant Country", 88-89.

[12] The proceedings of the Diet of 1568 extend in the edition of Szilágyi from page 338-344, while the best known article is on page 343 and concludes the protocol.

[13]While we should not overrate the importance of succession in the proceedings of the Diet, it still seems odd, that an important article, at least in historical and popular writings, should be only on the last place. In comparison the article passed by the Diet in 1571 is at the top of the proceedings, Diet Târgu Mureș, January 6-14 1571, *EOE* II, 374.

[14]Edit Szegedi, "Der Landtagsartikel von 1568 – Kontinuität oder Bruch?", *Banatica* 31 (2021): 154; concerning the theological rationale, Mihály Balázs, "Über den europäischen Kontext der siebenbürgischen Religionsgesetze des 16. Jahrhunderts", in *Humanismus und europäische Identität*, ed. Günter Frank (Ubstadt-Weiher Heidelberg Neustadt a.W. Basel: Regionalkultur, 2009), 22-23; Mihály Balázs, "Megjegyzések János Zsigmond valláspolitikájáról", in Mihály Balázs, *Hitújítás és egyházalapítás között. Tanulmányok az erdélyi unitarizmus 16.-17. századi történetéhez*, (Kolozsvár/Cluj-Napoca: Magyar Unitárius Egyház/Editura Episcopiei Unitariene, 2016), 44.

[15] Edit Szegedi, *Ringen um den einen Gott. Eine politische Geschichte des Antitrinitarismus in Siebenbürgen im 16. Jahrhundert* (Refor500 Academic Studies 95, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht, 2023), 7-9.

[16] *EOE* III, 472

needs of the readers than a document from the 16th century with all its deficiencies and unclarities. To put it bluntly, the decree or edict from 1568 is a creation of historians and popularisers which has almost nothing to do with the real document, the resolution of the Transylvanian Diet in January 1568.

In order to interpret the article from 1568, we first need to understand what a historical source is and what and how much we can and should expect from it. Subsequently, we need to put the article from 1568 in context and compare the image which emerges from the resolutions of the Transylvanian Diet between 1566-1571 to the different interpretations of the resolution from 1568 and the religious policy of the principality. An analysis of the Wikipedia pages dedicated to this topic will show to what extent these reflect the changes that occurred in the historiography of the last decade or if they continue to popularize the fiction of the four established religions in 1568.

The Austrian historian Fritz Fellner (1922-2012) tackles the question of what sources are and how reliable they can be.[17] Although not denying at all the fundamental role of sources in the knowledge and reconstruction of the past, Fellner points to the limits of sources linked to the way in which (written) historical sources are made. Historical sources are directing towards the happenings of the past, which historians perceive, interpret and represent. But historical sources bring us towards the historical event but not into the past. Sources are witnesses and traces of the past.[18] According to Carlo Ginzburg, what historians can do, is the securing of evidence or rather conservation of traces (Spurensicherung) through the analysis of sources. So, the past itself cannot be interrogated only its traces.[19]

The source is a tool which permits us to look into the hidden happenings of the past, so it is the means of the past towards the present. As part of the past, it makes the past visible. But it is not identical neither with the past nor with the totality of the past, because it cannot include the totality of the past, only pieces of it. No matter how many sources we have, our historical knowledge remains partial.[20]

The historical source comes into being only through the effort of being aware of what happened in the past or of the context. Sources are the means through which the real happening of the past is converted into the knowledge about the event. History therefore does not deal with the past but only with the material which is available for the research of the past.[21] Sources appear with the intention to record and transmit, while the intention of the creator should not be present to the historian.[22]

The past is knowledgeable only through the alienated version of the sources, therefore the process of knowledge is also a process of selection. Without the reduction of reality, knowledge is not possible. But this means that the totality of the past is lost. For those born after the events, the "present", which was not recorded, known and integrated into the historical knowledge, is lost.[23]

The resolution of the Diet from 1568 as well as many other article issued by this assembly lacks a very important part of their history. Because of the destruction of the archives, only the results of the deliberations survived but not the preparatory work.[24] So we don't know the way these articles were created, whose influence prevailed and if the order of the articles reflects or not their importance. Under these circumstances filling in the gaps means that fiction plays some role.[25]

The prehistory as well as the aftermath of the 1568 resolution can be partially reconstructed with the help of previous and following Diet resolutions. They form the context which not only makes the resolution from 1568 intelligible but also point to other possible interpretations which could be

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[17]Fritz Fellner, "Die historische Quelle – Instrument der Geschichtsforschung und Baustein des Geschichtsbewußtseins oder Baustein der Geschichtsforschung und Instrument des Geschichtsbewußtseins?", in *Umgang mit Quellen heute. Zur Problematik neuzeitlicher Quelleneditionen vom 16. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart*, eds. Grete Klingenstein, Fritz Fellner, Hans Peter Hye (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2003), 9-33.
[18] Fellner, "Die historische Quelle", 21-22.
[19] Fellner, "Die historische Quelle", 22.
[20] Fellner, "Die historische Quelle", 23-24; Lucian Boia, *Jocul cu trecutul. Istoria între adevăr şi ficţiune* (Bucureşti: Humanitas, 2008), 121.
[21] Fellner, "Die historische Quelle", 24.
[22] Fellner, "Die historische Quelle", 27.
[23] Fellner, "Die historische Quelle", 24-26.
[24] Balázs, "Tolerant Country", 86.
[25] Boia, *Jocul*, 120.

more realistic and yet more daring that those which still shape our understanding of Transylvanian and European history.[26]

The prehistory of the 1568 resolution can be traced back to 1566. Actually it could begin earlier with the two Diets from 1564 dedicated to the solutions of religious coexistence. The second Diet from 1564 (Aiud) provides us with an essential information for the understanding of the religious policy of the young state, namely which religious communities really existed. The Diets used the names of the *religiones* in a rather eclectic way, if it even uses a name.[27] In the resolution of the Diet of Aiud 1564 we have two *religiones*, namely the religion of Sibiu and that of Cluj.[28]

In 1564 or 1565 prince John Sigismund (or rather king John of Hungary) converted to Protestantism.[29] We don't know for sure because there was no public ceremony of this event (or at least no trace of a public conversion survived). But we could also assume that a public ceremony was not even necessary: John Sigismund never converted, because he didn't need to – Catholicism changed its meaning by cutting the links with Rome. What we know for sure is that in 1565 the religious policy of Transylvania knew a radical turn: Catholicism became the "faith of Rome" or the "popish faith".[30]

The search for compromise which characterized the resolutions of the Diet was abandoned in favour of a clearly Protestant message. In this context the two resolutions of the 1566 have both an anti-Catholic but also an anti-Orthodox edge: "Finally, the Prince, our Lord, has stirred up out of the goodness of God the light of the gospel in his Majesty's kingdom everywhere, and wishes that false doctrine and error should be purged from the holy church. Likewise it is requested that those clergymen who still are clinging to papal science and human doctrines, and will not repent, should be expelled for all times from the kingdom of his Majesty."(Diet of Turda, March 1566).[31] The Diet of Sibiu from November-December 1566 is another example: "The work […] of the preaching of the gospel should not be disturbed among any nation, nor the honour and majesty of God be offended, but rather all idolatries, and blasphemies against God be purged out and ceased, and […] that such idolatries be purged of all nations of this realm, and the word of God be freely preached, and especially among Romanians, who, being led by blind shepherds (priests) and have brought both themselves and the poor people to perdition. To those who will not submit to the truth, his Majesty commands that they should be brought to the interpretation of the Bible with Bishop George, their superintendent, and go to the interpretation of the truth; if they do not submit to the truth as it is understood, should be silenced, be they the Romanian bishop, or priests or monks, all shall obey only the one chosen bishop, the superintendent George, and the priests chosen by him, and those who have offended them shall be punished with the penalty of unbelief."[32]

Three facts are noteworthy: the transformation of the Catholic Church into the sect of the Pope, the existence of a Romanian church which is theoretically Protestant ("superintendent George") but in reality the majority of its members are Orthodox and that the Protestants are now the Catholics – the non-repentent Catholic and actually also the Orthodox priests are the errant sons of the Catholic Church and not representatives of other church bodies.[33] It is important to stress that the situation of the Romanian church was not unique. The "religion of Cluj" was in 1566 in a similar situation: the

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[26] Kovács Sándor, *Lapozgató: Az unitáriusok rövid története*, (Budapest - Kolozsvár: Magyar Unitárius Egyház – Kolozsvári Protestáns Teológiai Intézet 2021), 34.

[27] Ludwig Binder, *Grundlagen und Formen der Toleranz in Siebenbürgen bis zur Mitte des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Köln-Wien: Böhlau, 1976), 157; Szegedi, *Ringen*, 169, 174-175.

[28] *EOE II*, 231-232

[29] Ildikó Horn, *Hit és hatalom. Az erdélyi unitárius nemesség 16. századi története* (Budapest: Balassi, 2009), 43-45; Mihály Balázs, "Megjegyzések János Zsigmond valláspolitikájáról", in *Hitújítás és egyházalapítás között. Tanulmányok az erdélyi unitarizmus 16.-17. századi történetéhez*, ed. Balázs Mihály (Kolozsvár/Cluj-Napoca: Magyar Unitárius Egyház/Editura Episcopiei Unitariene, 2016), 54-56.

[30] *EOE II*, 289.

[31] *EOE* II, 302-303.

[32] *EOE* II, 326.

[33] Szegedi, *Ringen*, 23, 180.

head of the church, Francis Dávid, lead theologically mixt communities of Reformed and Antitrinitarians which at least until 1568 fought against each other.[34]

When the Diet convened in January 1568 there were only three legal *religiones* which had no clear-cut theological profile: the mainly but not exclusively German-speaking religion of Sibiu, the mainly but not exclusively Hungarian-speaking religion of Cluj and the Protestant Romanian church. So, if the resolution does not contain any confession it is because there were no confessions in 1568.[35] And surely, even if it would have contained a list of confessions, Catholicism would have been absent. Catholicism vanished away, but did not disappear totally. It survived in underground communities in the cities, at the estates of the Catholic nobility (as a concession or rather privilege) and in the Eastern part of the Szekler region.[36] Legally, Catholicism did not exist anymore. The Orthodox exist as unruly members of a Protestant church in a way that resembles the situation of the officially vanished Reformed who survived in the "religion of Cluj", in which Antitrinitarianism became the dominant theological feature.[37]

The absence of Catholicism in a potential list of confessions is proven by the almost unknown resolution from 1569: "Concerning the matter of religion, we have thus spoken, that the articles which were first made in the year 1566 at the assembly of St. Andrew's day in Sibiu, and afterwards last year at the assembly of the day of Epiphany in Turda, by the three nations of this country, and by our brothers in Hungary, should be kept in all their places, which we beseech your Majesty to keep in all things with grace.".[38] This article shows us that the resolution from 1568 was not a decree or edict, but a simple Diet article whose validity is linked to the anti-Catholic and anti-Orthodox resolution from 1566 and that the Catholics and Orthodox were not the beneficiaries of the law.[39] But the fact that neither confessions nor the concept of "received" are mentioned in the article had another reason. In the literature the issue of the missing list of confessions is explained by the fact that it was simply implied – everybody knew, which were those confessions, so it was not anymore necessary to repeat them.[40] But there are two answers which complement each other: 1. There were no confessions yet; 2. The real intent of the article was to abolish all confessions by preventing their formation.[41]

The first argument is very easy to prove. The formation of confessions began only in the early 1570s and can be partially traced[42] through Diet resolutions. As we have seen, Catholicism did not exist anymore legally; it was seen rather as a sect inside the Catholic Church. The Orthodox were formally members of a Protestant church. The Reformed assimilated into the Antitrinitarian mainstream. In all these cases it did not matter if they really existed or not, but if they legally existed or not.

The second argument needs more elaborated proofs, but they can be found in the text of the resolution itself, hidden in plain sight: "that pastors shall be free to preach and teach the Gospel wherever they may be and according to their own interpretation. If a parish chooses to accept this interpretation, well and good; if not, the parish shall not be forced to accept it against its will and shall be free to insist upon the maintenance of a preacher whose teachings suit its requirements. Following former constitutions, none of the superintendents, nor any other person shall have the right to offend a pastor or abuse anyone on the basis of his religion, nor shall anyone be threatened with imprisonment or removal from office for his preaching."[43]

The resolution states that religious matters are handled by the preachers and the local congregations and nobody, not even the superintendents can punish in anyway the preachers for their beliefs. The Hungarian historian Gyula Szekfű stated in 1935 that: "if the movement was not slowed

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[34] Serviciul Judeţean Cluj al Arhivelor Naţionale, Fond Primăria Municipiului Cluj-Napoca, Protocoalele adunărilor generale, microfilm, 4-1-85-143 (I/1 1566-1569), 15b, 18; Balázs Mihály, Dávid Ferenc életútja, in: *Reneszánsz Kolozsvár*, (Kolozsvár: Gloria 2008), 195.
[35] Balázs, "Über den europäischen Kontext", 16-27; Szegedi, *Ringen*, 7-10.
[36] Szegedi, *Ringen*, 190-191.
[37] Szegedi, *Ringen*, 169.
[38] Diet Mediaş, February 2-9 1569, *EOE* II: 534
[39] Szegedi, "Der Landtagsartikel", 157.
[40] Balázs, "Tolerant Country", 92-93.
[41] Szegedi, "Der Landtagsartikel", 165.
[42] Szegedi, *Ringen*, 169-218.
[43] Diet Turda 1568, EOE II, 343.

down it would have led to anarchy".[44] He referred to the expansion of Antitrinitarianism, calling it a kind of sect without hierarchy and structure, which intruded into the closed world of the villages disrupting age-old ties of rural communities.[45] This interpretation has some validity if we use the proper meaning of anarchy,[46] because by cutting the theological ties between the local ministers and their superintendents the congregations could practice full religious self-government.[47] The Diet resolution from 1570 seems to prove that after 1568 the situation actually led to anarchy understood as anomy and chaos: "We will carry out Your Majesty's order concerning the newly emerging heresies and their initiators; that Your Majesty considers honouring God and respecting his royal dignity of foremost importance, therefore he does not tolerate such blasphemy and heresy in his realm, but rather scrutinizes them and punishes both their authors and propagators in order to avoid an ever greater divine wrath upon us."[48]

The problem with this interpretation is, that the article refers to "newly emerging heresies", i.e. a very recent problem that was not encountered before. We can assume that it is about the unrest in Cluj linked to the socially radical preaching of Elias Gczmidele from Cracow. As Balázs puts it, this article cannot be interpreted as an attempt to end the chaos ensued because of the almost unregulated freedom of preaching for the received religions in 1568, because a year later (1571) the same freedom was reinforced.[49] But if the superintendent can't supervise the theological accuracy of the ministers in his jurisdiction by punishing or at least admonishing in case of divergence, what remains of his authority? The resolution from 1571 clarifies this issue: "It has been decided concerning the preaching of God's word that, just as Your Majesty earlier decided with the Diet, the word of God shall be preached freely everywhere. No one, neither preacher nor listener, shall come to harm on account of his confession, but if a minister should fall into criminal excess, he shall be condemned and deprived of all his functions by the superintendent, and then shall be banished from the realm."[50]

The superintendent retains his authority only in matters of morality, consolidating the state of anarchy in theological matters. This ecclesiastical anarchy allowed theological debates with no restriction from the hierarchy above and prevented the imposition of doctrinal homogeneity which is essential for the sheer existence of confessions. In this context, the concept of "received religions" (*receptae religiones*) would have been counterproductive. The aim of the resolution and of the religious policy in 1566-1571 was not to keep the existing religious communities separate and alive but to overcome the post-Reformation divisions by non-violent means.[51] The downgrading of the superintendents by taking away their role as supervisor of the doctrine and spiritual guide of their congregations and reducing them to mere clerical „vice inspector" whose „job description", as it is stated in 1571, serves exactly this purpose.

The term "received" appears for the first time in 1588 as "[in] religione recepta"[52], while in 1591, the concept is used in the now current form as received religions to differentiate between the Protestant confessions (the received ones) and the Catholics (the tolerated religion).[53] Only in 1595, after a coup staged by Prince Sigismund Báthory,[54] did the Diet proclaim the system of the four

[44] *Magyar történet IV. A tizenhatodik század*, ed. Hóman Bálint, Szekfű Gyula (Budapest: Királyi Egyetemi Nyomda, 1935), 271.

[45] *Magyar történet IV.,* 270.

[46] George Crowder, *Anarhismul clasic. Gândirea politică a lui Godwin, Proudhon, Bakunin şi Kropotkin* (Bucureşti: Antet, 1997), 13-14.

[47] Szegedi, "Der Landtagsartikel", 154, 160-161, 165.

[48] Diet Mediaş, February 2-9 1569, *EOE* II, 368; the interpretation of this Diet article as correctiv to the anarchic situation which emerged due to the article of 1568 was resumed by Márta Fata in her book *Ungarn, das Reich der Stephanskrone, im Zeitalter der Reformation und Konfessionalisierung. Multiethnizität, Land und Konfession 1500-1700* (Münster: Aschendorff 2000), 108-109.

[49] Balázs, "Über den europäischen Kontext", 14.

[50] Diet Târgu Mureş, January 6-14 1569, *EOE* II, 374.

[51] Balázs, "Über den europäischen Kontext", 19; Szegedi, "Der Landtagsartikel", 165; Szegedi, *Ringen*, 192.

[52] Diet Mediaş, December 8-23 1588, *EOE* III, 240

[53] Diet Alba Iulia, November 1-20 1591, *EOE* III, 385.

[54] Balázs, "Über den europäischen Kontext", 26-27; Szegedi, *Ringen*, 215.

received religions, among them Catholicism.[55] It was only in 1653 that the Orthodox faith was designated as a tolerated religion.[56]

The course of the religious policy of Transylvania changed in 1571, after the death of John Sigismund. His successor, Stephen Báthory (1571-1586, between 1576-1586 king of Poland), was a Catholic aristocrat whose religious policy can be summed up in the following way: he tried to ameliorate the situation of Catholicism in Transylvania and institute a policy of Catholic restoration without affronting the Protestant estates and transgressing the existing juridical framework.[57] His line of attack was oriented against Antitrinitarianism which he tried to weaken by sustaining the Trinitarian Protestants, whose confession-building he promoted. Hence we can speak about confessions in the proper sense only beginning with 1571.[58]

The "classical" interpretation of the resolution from 1568 can be summed up in the following way: at the Diet of Turda convened in January 1568 the religious freedom of four received confessions, Catholicism, Calvinism, Lutheranism and Antitrinitarianism was proclaimed through the Edict/Decree of Turda. There is another slightly different version of this interpretation, which states that Antitrinitarianism was only proclaimed as received in 1571.[59]

This interpretation had its opponents, but the real change came with the articles of Mihály Balázs, one of them published in 2009 in German and 2013 in English. Equally important, in 2009 the historian Ildikó Horn challenged the classical interpretation in her book about the Unitarian nobility in the 16th century.[60] Did this kind of research changed the established image of the resolution? And if, has the new interpretation become known and popular?

Due to their popularity, the Wikipedia pages can show us if and how the newer interpretations can become mainstream. Of course, we have to be cautious and not use Wikipedia pages as infallible criterion. On the other hand, Wikipedia pages are often the first reference, be it only to get the first and basic information about a subject. Of course, they can have a very diverse quality, which can be observed in the four Wikipedia pages about the Diet resolution of 1568.

The four pages are chosen on linguistical criteria. Given that it is a Transylvanian issue, it should have a Romanian, Hungarian and German page and one in English as well, because of its high degree of popularity. Three pages are titled Edict of Torda, the German, English and Romanian, while the Hungarian page uses the (more appropriate) term of "1568-as tordai törvény" (the 1568 law of Torda), and is a chapter in the Wikipedia page concerning religious freedom.

Combined with the illustration, the painting of Aladár Körösfői-Kriesch "Francis Dávid in front of the Diet of Turda" (1898), which appears in each of the four Wikipedia pages, suggests that the resolution was crafted as a heroic act and proclaimed by the court preacher with pathos. Something announced with such heartfelt solemnity cannot be a simple resolution, it has to be a decree or edict, a turning point in history. The importance of this document is further highlighted in the German and Romanian Wikipedia pages by the fact that its location is the Brukenthal Museum.[61] Actually, it is kept in the Sibiu County Department of the National Archives (Direcţiunea Judeţeană Sibiu a Arhivelor Naţionale) as part of the Brukenthal Collection (Colecţia Brukenthal). The document itself is not a separate sheet or diploma, but one of the entries in the collection of Diet resolutions.[62]

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[55] Diet Alba Iulia, April 16-May 2 1595, *EOE* III: 472

[56] *Approbatae Constitutiones Regni Transylvaniae & Partium Hungariae Eidem Annexarum. Ex Articulis ab Anno Millesimo Quingentissimo Quadragesimo, ad praesentem huncusque Millesimum Sexcentessimum Quinquagesimum tertium conclusis, compilatae. Ac primum quidem per Dominos Consiliarios revisae, tandemque in Generali Dominorum Regnicolarum, ex Edicto Celsissimi Principis, D.D. GEORGII RÁKOCZI II. Dei Gratia Principis Transylvaniae, Partium Regni Hungariae Domini, & Siculorum Comitis, & Domini eorum Clementissimi, in Civitatem Albam Juliam ad diem decimumquintum mensis Januarii Anni praesentis 1653. Congregatorum, conventu, publice relectae, intermixtis etiam Constitutionibus sub eadem Diaeta editis*, Claudiopoli 1815, Prima Pars. Titulus Secundus, Articulus III, 2.

[57] Szegedi, *Ringen*, 196.

[58] Horn, *Hit*, 109, 140; Szegedi, *Ringen,* 196-197, 203.

[59] Szegedi, *Ringen*, 174

[60] Horn, *Hit*, 120-121.

[61] "Edikt_von_Torda"; „Edictul_de_la_Turda".

[62] In 2018 I had to find and read the article in front of TV-cameras but I did barely succeed, because I thought that such important resolution has to be among the first articles if not the opening article of the Diet proceedings of 1568. All my knowledge about the resolution was not strong enough to displace the image of the resolution as edict or decree which had to be announced with fanfare.

Another important feature of the Wikipedia pages is that they highlight the role of Francis Dávid and John Sigismund. As we have seen, no traces of deliberations linked to the Diet resolutions survived, so that we have the end product without knowing how it was made. We can assume that the Antitrinitarian theology played an important role in shaping the Transylvanian religious policy and as court preacher Dávid could have influenced the young ruler. But we don't know if Dávid participated at the Diet and if he held a sermon in front of the ruler and the Estates, and if this sermon was even related to religious policy. We don't know, if, as the English Wikipedia states, the three Nations (estates) adopted the resolution "at the request of the monarch's court preacher, Ferenc Dávid".[63] All this might have happened, it is very plausible that Dávid influenced the ruler or that he even participated at the Diet, but there are no direct proofs of Dávid's involvement.

The English and Hungarian Wikipedia pages also contain the prehistory of the resolution, as it can be reconstructed on the basis of Diet resolutions linked to religious policy in Transylvania. But there is a seemingly strange twist: while the English Wikipedia page mentions the incomplete resolution of the 1566 Diet in Sibiu,[64] the Hungarian page ignores it totally and jumps from the 1564 Diet in Aiud to the Diet in Turda 1568.[65] The mentioning of the Diet of 1566 in the English Wikipedia page is incomplete and distorted: "Two years later the Diet made a Romanian Calvinist pastor, Gheorghe of Sîngeorgiu, the head of the Church of Romanians. The Diet also ordered the expulsion of the Eastern Orthodox clerics who were unwilling to adhere to Calvinism, but the decree was never implemented".[66]

To understand the degree of distortion, the resolution of the Sibiu Diet from 1566 will be quoted again: "The work […] of the preaching of the gospel should not be disturbed among any nation, nor the honour and majesty of God be offended, but rather all idolatries, and blasphemies against God be purged out and ceased, and […] that such idolatries be purged of all nations of this realm, and the word of God be freely preached, and especially among Romanians, who, being led by blind shepherds (priests) and have brought both themselves and the poor people to perdition." The first part of the resolution repeats the statement of the Turda Diet in the same year, that "all idolatries, and blasphemies against God [should] be purged out and ceased, and […] that such idolatries be purged of all nations of this realm", which was directed against the Catholic clergy ("still are clinging to papal science and human doctrines, and will not repent") and adds the Orthodox clergy which does not want to obey its Protestant superintendent. So, the resolution of 1566 was directed not only against the Orthodox but also the Catholic clergy as well against their beliefs, called "idolatry and blasphemy".

The references to "the preaching of the gospel should not be disturbed among any nation", and "idolatries be purged of all nations of this realm" clearly show that the targets were Western and Eastern Christians who did not (yet) accept the teachings of the Reformation. Mentioning only the Orthodox clergy is bending the source in order to fit the narrative. Of course, the resolution of 1569 which makes the resolution of 1566 to the frame of interpretation for the article of 1568, is absent from all Wikipedia pages, because it seriously questions the general accepted narrative about the four received religions. Or rather it would uncover the fictional character of the "decree"/"edict" of 1568.
The content of the resolution itself in all four Wikipedia pages fits into the general narrative, but there are differences between the four approaches.

The German Wikipedia page states: "With the Edict, Transylvania gave itself a multiconfessional Constitution. the Lutheran, Reformed, Catholic and Unitarian confessions were explicitly named as the recognized religions. "[67] Actually, as we have seen already, it was a simple resolution and no confessions were named. The Romanian Wikipedia is more complicated, contradictory and full of mistakes. It states in the beginning that it is a "decree through which the freedom of conscience and the religious tolerance were proclaimed for all inhabitants of Transylvania" and "According to the edict, no person could be disadvantaged because of his or her confession, and no one could be forced to believe one faith or another, because faith come from God."[68]

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[63] "Edict_of_Torda".
[64] "Edict_of_Torda".
[65] "Az_1568-as tordai_törvény".
[66] "Edict_of_Torda".
[67] "Edikt_von_Torda".
[68] „Edictul_de_la_Turda".

These statements which can be considered a fairly good summary of the resolution are contradicted by others which are so erroneous that it would take another paper to analyse and debunk them: "The Edict of Torda does not specify any particular religious denominations, which led to conflicts between the various Protestant denominations. Therefore, in 1571, Prince Stefan Báthory issued the edict of Târgu Mureş, in which he specified that the accepted religions were Roman Catholic, Calvinist, Lutheran and Unitarian, prohibiting any religious innovations. In Transylvania, Orthodoxy and Judaism had the status of tolerated religions, *religio tolerata*.[69] The statement begins with a correct observation, because indeed there are no denominations mentioned, but it continues with a cascade of errors: the conflicts between the different theological currents of Protestantism date back to the 1550s and are not linked to the 1568 resolution; the "edict" of Târgu Mureş from 1571 was in the time of John Sigismund and not Stephen Báthory (indeed, Báthory became Prince of Transylvania in 1571, but none of the Diets of this year under his rule were hold in Târgu Mureş);[70] at the Diet of Târgu Mureş no confession was mentioned, as we have seen; the first Diet under the rule of Báthory prohibiting religious innovations was in 1572 and not 1571.[71]

The next part deals with the exclusion of the Orthodox and Jewish faith, which appears also in the English version: "Furthermore, it does not cover the Eastern Orthodox Romanians, the Jews and the Muslims"[72] is based on the ignorance of the sources and the demographic situation of Transylvania in the 16th century. To begin with the second part, in 1568 there were no Jews and Muslims in Transylvania. The first Jewish community was founded in 1623.[73] The lawmakers did not count as subjects of law individuals who passed through Transylvania or lived for a period of time in the principality. Transylvania did not have any Muslim population, despite or rather because of the Ottoman suzerainty, which meant that no Ottoman troops were stationed on the territory of the principality.[74] Moreover, Muslim individuals who might have travelled through Transylvania were not important for the lawmaker.

The situation of Orthodox communities is more complicated than it might seem. The Diet of 1568 issued a resolution which deals with the Romanian church: "We humbly report to your Majesty that there are many in your Majesty's country who disobey the Wallachian bishop, who was appointed to this position by your grace; they prefer to follow the former priests and their heresies, and prevent the bishop from properly fulfilling his duties; therefore we beg your Majesty to graciously grant the advancement of the Gospel according to your Majesty's earlier decree concerning the country, and to punish those who dare oppose it."[75] This article does not deal with the legal status of the aforementioned church. It is about the Orthodox clergy who does not obey its Protestant bishop. This situation, as stated earlier in this paper, was not specific to the Romanian (Protestant) church. The "religion of Cluj" lead by Francis Dávid had a similar issue with the ministers who would not obey their bishop and continue to preach the Trinitarian theology. If at the Diet of 1568 the main issue of religious policy would have been indeed the acknowledgement of received religions, then the Romanian church would have been a received one because it was Protestant. Only it was not about juridical status, but about freedom of preaching, which was denied for Catholics and Orthodox as well. The Hungarian Wikipedia page also deals with the prehistory of the resolution, but skips the Diet articles of 1566. The content of the resolution, whose text is quoted integrally, is summed up by highlighting the main points: the right of local communities to freely elect their pastors, it refers only to the four received religions (Catholicism included), no persecution for someone's faith, no state-

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[69] „Edictul_de_la_Turda".

[70] There were only two Diets in 1571 under Ştefan Báthory's rule, in Alba Iulia (May 1571, *EOE* II, 471-476) and Cluj (November-December 1571, *EOE* II, 494-508).

[71] Diet Turda, May 25-29 1572, *EOE* II, 528.

[72] „Edictul_de_la_Turda"; „Edict_of_Torda".

[73] Gabriel Bethlen's privilege letter for Jews, 18 June 1623, *EOE* VIII (Budapest, 1882), 143-145.

[74] Hegyi Klára, *Egy világbirodalom végvidékein*, (Budapest: Gondolat, 1982), 69, 74; Călin Felezeu, „Statutul Principatului Transilvaniei în raporturile cu Imperiul Otoman", in *Studii istorice. Omagiu profesorului Camil Mureşanu la împlinirea vârstei de 70 de ani*, (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 1998), 137; Gerald Volkmer, *Siebenbürgen zwischen Habsburgermonarchie und Osmanischem Reich. Völkerrechtliche Stellung und Völkerrechtspraxis eines ostmitteleuropäischen Fürstentums 1541-1699*, (Schriften des Bundesinstituts für Kultur der Deutschen im östlichen Europa, Band 56, München: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2015), 497.

[75] Diet Turda 1568, *EOE* II, 341.

religion, individual choice of faith, revocation of the territorial principle so that many confessions could coexist in the same town or village and the landlords could not interfere with the religious affiliation of their serfs.[76]

This list is a mixed bag which includes some errors: besides mentioning the four received religions there are the individual choice of faith and the possibility of confessional coexistence in the same locality. That the landlords could not interfere with the faith of their serfs can be a valid point; only the explicit interdiction – and just for Catholic landlords – was issued in 1591.[77]

If we compare the English and Hungarian Wikipedia pages we will find incongruences between them. The English page states: "The Edict of Torda does not acknowledge the individual's right to religious freedom",[78] which is correct, because the only persons who can choose their faith are the preachers. The right of the communities to choose their pastors contradicts the coexistence of different confessions in the same locality. The community which had the right to call a pastor was the political one and normally the political community and the parish congregation overlapped. The best example is the city of Cluj, where the city council decided which theology should be preached. The parish priest was Francis Dávid, who was also the bishop of the "religion of Cluj" and court preacher in Alba Iulia. So, every dimension of political and religious life overlapped and there were still conflicts between those who embraced Antitrinitarianism and those who defended Trinitarian theology, because there was no room for both doctrines. So, if the resolution cuts the theological ties between local congregations and their superintendents and allows in theological matters a complete self-government (hence the state of an-archy), it does not mean that it allowed the existence either of individual choice of faith or dissident movements inside a given community. The Antitrinitarians had a sense of order and hierarchy and did not like social radicalism.[79] If Antitrinitarian theology stood behind the resolution of 1568, which we can assume as real, even in absence of direct proofs, then "communities" mean both religious and political communities.

One characteristic of Transylvanian Antitrinitarians was their unwillingness to become an established church. They aimed not only at the reunification of Reformation but of the whole Christianity and even the monotheistic religions. The existence of different versions of Christianity was something they wanted to overcome and not to preserve. So, the resolution of 1568 like the whole religious policy between 1566-1571 was anything but a celebration of religious diversity. On the contrary, it was an attempt to rebuild the lost unity of Christianity and the Abrahamic religions.[80]

Conclusion

The Wikipedia pages about the Diet article of 1568 are marked by a certain kind of historical interpretation which claims to be based on sources, but in reality, does not rely upon them. Hence the contradictions not only in the interpretation but in the presentation of the content itself. It is, as if the Wikipedia pages would deal about different things and not about the same resolution from the 16th century. The source in question is not treated as a trace of the past or a window to the past but as a projection screen or even as a battlefield for the prerogative of interpreting the past. But the Wikipedia pages are not much worse than the bibliography or rather the bibliographical selection for the article. None of the four pages uses for instance Mihály Balázs' seminal article.

The four Wikipedia pages can be seen as an illustration of Fritz Fellner's statement about historical sources: "The source becomes the thread which we, due to our impulse as researcher, pull out from the fabric of history, without acknowledging that actually we unravel the fabric itself."[81] The Diet resolution of 1568 is the thread that was pulled out totally or partially from its historical context.

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[76] "Az_1568-as_tordai_törvény".
[77] Diet 1591, 385.
[78] "Edict_of_Torda".
[79] Kovács Sándor, "Dávid Ferenc és a kerek kő. Mítosz vagy valóság?", in *A recepta religiók évszázadai Erdélyben. Egyháztörténeti tanulmányok*, eds. Kolumbán Vilmos, József (Cluj-Napoca:Editura Institutului Teologic Protestant, 2019), 56.
[80] Balázs, "Megjegyzések", 55-56; Szegedi, *Ringen*, 201.
[81] Fellner, "Die historische Quelle", 27.

Without the unravelled fabric the thread lost its quality as source and became a fiction which swallowed the real text.[82]

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[82]Wikipedia "can" invent things which never existed, as the following article suggests: We Carry a Free Territory in Our Hearts: How Wikipedia Fabricated an Anarchist State, https://www.thecommoner.org.uk/we-carry-a-free-territory-in-our-hearts/?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTEAAR2gvTaBLys_opMIKdK3ECvv3b9I5GcsGOQ07hc74INeyh665mTpAAoxXLU_aem_AWC3tEvsf5yH9Ma6_J_bzwe4i_Ggzwd91bRnRpAyFCBD5UsNY1_2nDKmLLh7LNS324rS6nqh2To5F213SarMVDyU, 15 May 2024.

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Rezumat: Dr. Otto Greffner, istoric, arheolog, profesor şi om politic, a adus contribuţii semnificative la viaţa culturală a oraşului său natal Şiria (pe atunci Hellburg), din judeţul Arad, în vestul României. Chiar dacă şi-a petrecut ultima perioadă de creaţie în Germania, la Wheil am Rhein, în unele dintre scrierile sale înfăţişează peisaje romantice şi o viziune asupra lumii care gravitează în jurul podgoriilor din districtul său natal. Ultima sa lucrare, *Der einsame Reiter* (*Călăreţul singuratic*), îşi are rădăcinile adânc îngropate în regiunea Aradului, iar povestea nu este chiar fictivă, după cum Greffner însuşi a menţionat într-un interviu cu autorul articolului de faţă. Prin această ultimă scriere a sa, Greffner a încercat să-şi reconstruiască propria istorie familială şi să-şi regăsească trecutul. Acest studiu va oferi o perspectivă de ansamblu atât asupra biografiei lui Otto Greffner, cât şi asupra activităţii sale culturale care l-a făcut o figură importantă în istoria comunităţilor germane/şvabe din vestul României.

Abstract: Dr. Otto Greffner, historian, archaeologist, teacher and politician, made significant contributions to the cultural life in his hometown of Şiria (back then, Hellburg), in Arad County, in western Romania. Even though he has spent his last creative period in Germany, in Wheil am Rhein, in some of his writings he portrayed romantic landscapes and a worldview gravitating around the vineyards from his native district. His last work, *Der einsame Reiter* (*The Lone Rider*), has its roots buried deep in the region of Arad, and the story is not quite fictional, as Greffner himself mentioned in an interview with the author of the present paper. Greffner has hereby tried to reconstruct his own family history and regain his past. This paper will offer a brief insight into both Otto Greffner´s biography, as well as his cultural activity that made him an important figure in the history of the German/Swabian communities in western Romania.

Cuvinte-cheie: Greffner, Banat, şvabi, monografie, multiculturalism, viaţa satului.

Keywords: Greffner, Banat, Danube Swabians, monography, multiculturalism, village life.

The Banat Swabian scientist Dr. Otto Greffner, an important representative of the German cultural milieu in Arad, was born on 5 November 1927 in Şiria/Hellburg into a football-loving family - a hobby that would mark his later life. His father, Gheorghe Greffner, was the centre-midfield of the local football team in the 1930s. Otto Greffner studied history and philosophy at Victor Babeş University in Cluj-Napoca and has distinguished himself through a long scientific, didactic, and last but not least, sporting activity. He played in several football teams, such as Universitatea Cluj, UTA Arad, Vagoane Arad, to later become the coach of the team in Şiria for 17 years. For his contribution to the development of sports in Şiria, the local football stadium was named in his honour, in 2011.[1]

Besides football, he made contributions to the cultural life in the region. He is among those responsible for the foundation of the museum in honour of Romanian writers Ioan Slavici and Emil Monţia in the Bohus Palace in Şiria, as well as for the opening of the Adam Müller Guttenbrunn memorial house in Guttenbrunn. He has also written studies on all medieval fortresses in the Arad region and in western Romania, which he knew well, as a result of his 20 years of work as an archaeologist. Last but not least, he pushed for the restoration and reorganisation of the German-language education in Arad. His position as inspector for minority education between 1950-1957

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[1] *Actualitatea Şiriana*, no. 47, 4 August, 2014.

made it easier for him to establish and acquire funding for numerous German language schools in Arad, Neuarad, Şiria, but also in Schimand, Semlac and St. Anna.

In 1976, during Ceauşeascu´s regime, Greffner was dismissed from his position as Director of Studies at the Arad District Museum, and in the 1980s, he was banned from teaching. On the other hand, he continued his work as a historian at the National Museum in Arad, where he was also a member of the editorial board of the scientific journal *Ziridava,* and was involved in the opening of the Emil Monţia exhibition at the Bohuş Castle in Şiria.

Greffner immigrated to Germany in 1982.[2] He settled in Munich, where he worked as a lecturer at the university and in 1987 he took up the job of counsellor for Eastern European policies in the cabinet of Bavarian Prime Minister Hans Josef Strauß.[3] In 1993, he also taught in Basel. As a member of the Special Commission for the Reappraisal of the Second World War, Greffner campaigned for an objective portrayal of the war and influenced the current view on history with his over 40 non-fiction books he published, mainly concerning the history of the Banat Swabians.

As a historian and ethnographer, Otto Greffner studied personalities and aspects of the Second World War (Erwin Rommel, the battles of Monte Casino and in the Atlantic) but also with topics of Romanian history and politics, including *Romania in the Political and Military Concert of Europe* (1930-1945). He died on 3 August 2014 at the age of 86 in his home in Landshut/Weil am Rhein and was buried, according to his last wishes, in the Catholic cemetery from his home village of Şiria.

The present paper tries to offer a brief insight on the biographical aspects of his last work, *Der einsame Reiter [The Lone Rider]*, published in 1996. The author confesses in the Foreword that the events of the book rely on real life. He has also partially kept the original names.

A monography serves as a reminder of times gone by; it is a collection of information and data, but also of local legends and myths. Monographies are usually holistic. They attempt to illuminate and present a topic from all points of view. In this case, a reflection of life in Banat and the region around Arad in the second half of the 19th century, immediately after the revolution of 1848/49. The author is not a writer, not a poet, but a historian and archaeologist. Literary virtuosity is not the aim of his novel. Important to him are the description of life in the Swabian village and in Arad County, the history of the settlement and development of the Swabians in Banat, the socio-economic upheaval that the revolution of 1848 brought about in the region, the presentation of customs, social structure, the judicial system and the school system in the Austro-Hungarian state.

Greffner describes the geography of the place, makes a short introduction on the history of the settlement of the Swabians in Banat, the events during the revolution in 1848, the involvement of Romanians led by Avram Iancu and the Hungarians led by Kossuth Lajos. The novel represents a reclamation of the past and of Greffner's own identity. Fate, the focal centrepiece of the novel, sheds light on the social turmoil and the aftermath of the revolution, all built on the literary construction of a regional thriller.

The main setting is present day Şiria, back then Hellburg (Villagos in Hungarian), in the centre of the Arad wine-growing region, along the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains. The municipality's landmark is represented by the ruins of a medieval castle that looks out over the endless plain. Hellburg is not a distinctly German community. It is home to a mixture of peoples typical of Transylvania and the Balkans: Romanians, Swabians, Hungarians, formerly also Jews and, last but not least, Roma. Banat is, as Greffner explains: *ein sonderbares Stück Erde: Obwohl oft zu Siebenbürgen gehörig, doch nicht Siebenbürgen; obwohl oft bei Ungaren, doch nicht Ungarn* ["A strange piece of earth: although often belonging to Transylvania, it is not Transylvania; although often with Hungary, it is \not Hungary." [4]] The coexistence with various nationalities has made the German ethnic group culturally and economically richer, just as its influence on other nationalities cannot be overlooked to this day.

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[2] Otto Greffner and Mario Stoica, "Administraţie româmească arădeană," *Studii şi comunicări din Banat-Crişana,* vol. 6 (Arad: „Vasile Goldiş" University Press, 2013), 508.

[3] Balthasar Waitz, "90. Geburtstag des Arader Historikers Dr. Otto Greffner," *Banater Gedenktage 2017*, Last amendment 4 October, 2017. http://www.adz.ro/banater-zeitung/artikel-banater-zeitung/artikel/banater-gedenktage-2017-2/ ,

[3] Otto Greffner, *Der einsame Ritter. Eine Familienchronik aus dem Siebenbürgen-Banat* (Offenburg: Jasmin-Eichner Publishing House, 1996).

[4] Greffner, *Der einsame Ritter*, 5.

This community was systematically organised by the Austrians at the beginning of the 18th century.[5] The upheaval in Europe caused by the Napoleonic Wars was also felt dramatically in Banat. Timisoara was an important military centre of the Austrian army, the seat of an army corps. Banat was an important *hinterland* of the monarchy, especially after the loss of some territories in the Napoleonic Wars.

Despite considerable damage brought by the wars, the region witnessed economic and social development after 1815. Farming remained the main occupation of the local population. During those years, agriculture underwent considerable modernisation; the means of production improved, the first agricultural machinery appeared, which brought an increase in production of all agricultural sectors and livestock farming experienced a significant upswing.[6]

The Swabian peasant economy, free from feudal conditions and obligations, remained the economic nucleus of German economic life in the Banat for a long time. Villages and communities developed at an increasingly rapid pace. Farming expanded. Stables, barns, outhouses, granaries and pantries were built. The general economic upturn is also reflected in the social sphere: the standard of living of the population rose and a relative prosperity became noticeable particularly in the German-speaking communities. According to statistical data, three quarters of the German population in Banat worked in agriculture, the rest were craftsmen, merchants, miners and industrial workers.[7] "Thanks to their economic prowess, the Swabian peasantry of Banat achieved a prosperity that was probably unrivalled in Europe",[8] remarks the cultural politician Anton Valentin, a prosperity that is also reflected in Greffner's novel.

After the revolution of 1848, normal life returned in the community. The Austrian military withdrew and only the gendarmerie remained.[9] The abolition of serfdom led to a general improvement of life – peasants bought more and more land from the large landowners. The Romanian population benefitted the most from this abolition, since the German ethnics could not be serfs. The former landlords, who lost their privileges, tried to adapt to the new economic conditions. Instead of serfs, they see themselves forced to use wage labour of day labourers. At the same time, a differentiation of the rural population began: the stratum of large farmers, both German and Romanian, emerged. In the years following the revolution, the more or less peaceful life of the community was disturbed and interrupted several times by the Betyars and poor journeymen, who operated in groups and carried out raids.

The Betyars have a long tradition in the Balkans. This phenomenon appeared in Hungary as well as in Transylvania and the Romanian principalities. Already after the expulsion of the Turks, during the reign of Maria Theresa, former serf farmers and servants, but also those who were legally persecuted, organized themselves into groups, and carried out raids. Their targets were particularly rich landowners with large estates, but also authorities. A group of seven Betyars who had their territory in the area around Hellburg made headlines at the time.[10] In 1857, they raided the Altsanktanna community centre and took all the money they could find from the community treasury. In Kovasintz they attacked the gendarmerie headquarters, disarmed and killed several gendarmes. Among the outlaws, as it turned out later, were three Germans, one from the St. Anna village, named Kornacker, who had been an officer in the Hungarian army. Only in 1858 did the military succeed in putting a stop to these Betyars. Some were killed in battle, others were captured and executed or sentenced to long prison terms. The leader of the group was an Italian named Alonso. They were free roaming men who did not obey the laws of the state and waged war against the rich and the authorities. As it turned out at the trial, the majority of them were Honved soldiers from the former Hungarian army.[11]

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[5] Otto Greffner, *Hellburg-Șiria-Villagos* (Arad, Ziridava Publishing House, 1990), 4.

[6] Otto Greffner, *Das Banat und die Banater Schwaben* (Weil am Rhein, 1996), 76.

[7] Greffner, *Das Banat,* 123.

[8] Anton Valentin, "Die Banater Schwaben. Kurzgefasste Geschichte einer südostdeutschen Volksgruppe. Mit einem volkskundlichen Anhang. Veröffentlichung des Kulturreferates der Landsmannschaft der Banater Schwaben", *Arbeitsheft* 1, München (1959), 74.

[9] Greffner, *Hellburg-Șiria-Villagos,* 133.

[10] Greffner, *Hellburg-Șiria-Villagos,* 137.

[11] Greffner, *Hellburg-Șiria-Villagos,* 138.

This socio-historical episode is the focal point of Greffner's novel. It depicts life from the second half of the 19ᵗʰ century, immediately after the Revolution of 1848/49. All male characters are involved in the revolution on different sides. The main protagonists are a distinguished Austro-Hungarian magnate family and a Banat Swabian family, Count Zselinsky and the Kornacker family. Count Aristid Zselinsky, descendant of a proud line of ancestors stretching back to the 16ᵗʰ century, was rewarded for his loyal service to the empire and elevated to the nobility. Not far from the city of Arad, they were given 14,000 hectares of farmland, meadows and forest. This made them one of thirty large landowning families in Arad County. They live in a Baroque castle in the middle of the estate. The youngest son, Robert, was given the task of managing the estate. Josef Zselinsky and Josef Kornacker, a brave craftsman's son, were the same age and grew up together as brothers. They benefited from same upbringing as Mrs. Ingeborg, the governess from Vienna, despite their social differences. Thus, the peasant Josef Kornacker learned to read and write. The count's children, on the other hand, learned the Swabian dialect and many legends and stories from this region, especially from the period of Turkish occupation. Even during his education and military career in Vienna, Count Robert proved himself to be honest, good-natured, wise and punctual. The elder son, Josef Zselinsky, on the other hand, did not fulfil the family's requirements and expectations. He spent his youth recklessly in Vienna and Pest, where he quickly lost the money of his father and his wife, Baroness Julia Bohus,[12] playing cards.

Disinherited by his embittered father, Josef left his family and moved to Budapest. Because Josef Kornacker was a good pupil, Count Aristid decided to send him to Budapest to study with his sons at his own expense. He attended the agricultural school there in 1844. He married Emilia from Budapest, whose love was to be his undoing. The young Count Josef also loved Emilia, which led to a quarrel between the two, and their friendship turned into enmity. The young Kornacker married Emilia in the Count's house, and despite the scandal between the two namesakes, the relationship between the two families remained more than amicable. Kornacker was employed as caretaker of the estate.

But the peaceful life of the families is shattered by a violent incident. The young Count Josef covets Kornacker's wife and frequently harasses her. During a gunfight between the two men, Count Josef Zselinsky is seriously injured and Kornacker flees. Outlawed and wanted by the authorities, he is suspected of being one of the Betyars and of having committed several murders and robberies. While on the run from the law, he actually ends up in the hands of Hungarian robbers. Greffner's Betyars speak Hungarian but also German with a Hungarian accent and explain to the runaway Josef: *Wir sind fünf, alle ehemalige Soldaten der ungarischen Befreiungsarmee. Um zu überleben, müssen wir Überfälle verüben. Unsere Einbrüche gelten nur den Reichen, den Armen helfen wir.*[13] ["We are five, all former soldiers of the Hungarian Liberation Army. To survive, we have to commit robberies. We rob only the rich, we help the poor."] later we learn that because of their actions, they are no longer ordinary Betyars, but fighters for justice: *Wir sind keine Mörder und keine gewöhnlichen Betyaren. Wir sind Freischärler. Wir kämpfen gegen soziale Ungerechtigkeit, gegen die Armut und gegen österreichische Unterdrückungen.*[14] ["...we are not murderers and not ordinary Betyars. We are free fighters. We are fighting against social injustice, against poverty and against Austrian oppression."] They are a mixed gang: their leader is Alonso Martinelli, of Italian origin, other members are Pankratz Müller, German, Jancsik Istvan, Szabo Ferencz, and Peter Joska, Hungarian. As a historian, the author of the novel remains faithful to the historical documents, Greffner's main concern being that of recording the past.

The interculturality of the region is palpable in Greffner's novel. Banat Swabians, Hungarians and Romanians live in Şiria, as well as Roma who make bricks, living on the outskirts of the village. Josef Kornacker's lawyer is Dr. Schönherz, a Jew who studied in Buda. Although they have different ethnic origins and socio-economic backgrounds, they lead a harmonious life side by side, in the same time trying not to intervene in each other's lives and problems. In the descriptions of life in the

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[12] The Bohus Castle, built in 1983, is located in Hellburg. The surrender of the Hungarian troops to the Russian armies, led by Katlaroff, was signed in the very library of Bohus Palace on 13 August 1849.

[13] Greffner, *Der einsame Ritter*, 108.

[14] Greffner, *Der einsame Ritter*, 111.

community, the economic and social structures, Greffner also draws affectionate portraits of some of the farmers of different ethnicities and aspects of their everyday lives.

The fleeing Kornacker enjoys the hospitality of the Hungarian Kiss family: "Die Gutherzigkeit und Hilfsbereitschaft der Menschen war in dieser Gegend unbegrenzt, ob es nun Ungarn, Deutsche oder Rumänen waren, einen Wanderer ließ man nicht unbewirtet vorüberziehen."[15] [*The kind-heartedness and helpfulness of the people in this region was unlimited, whether they were Hungarians, Germans or Romanians, a traveller was not allowed to pass by unhosted.*] The family of Romanian farmer Gheorghe Ardelean harboured and hid him during the day in a well-camouflaged cellar, and Ardelean gave him provisions and a thick blanket for the journey to Kovasinz, where he was to seek out his brother-in-law for further help: *Er fühlte sich wohl und in Sicherheit bei dem rumänischen Bauern. Diese Bevölkerung war im allgemeinen gutwillig und hilfsbereit zu Fremden*[16] ["He felt comfortable and safe with the Romanian farmer. These people were generally kind and helpful to strangers."]. Kornacker enjoys the help and care of several of the region's residents, which leads him to think: *Ein gemischtes Volk, dachte Josef. Wie friedlich sie beisammen sind, wenn sie niemand gegeneinander aufhetzt.*[17] ["A mixed people, Josef thought. How peaceful they are together when no one turns them against each other."].

At the beginning, the Revolution in Banat had a unified character and only later, when national equality was ignored, the nations in the region organised themselves separately, with their own programmes.[18] The revolutionary context awakened and inflamed national passions. Different ethnic groups had different reactions to the unfolding events: the Danube German rural population was primarily concerned with social and economic success, the Hungarian population sided with Kossuth Lajos,[19] while other ethnic groups feared for their independence and identity. The *moți*[20] of the region are disappointed and hopeless: *Im Bürgerkrieg haben wir Rumänen an der Seite des Kaisers gekämpft in der Hoffnung, dass wir in Siebenbürgen mit den anderen Nationen gleichgestellt würden. Mit den Ungarn, Szeklern und Sachsen. Und was haben wir erreicht? Nichts! Alles ist beim alten geblieben. Das Volk ist veärgert und enttäuscht.*[21] ["In the civil war, we Romanians fought alongside the Emperor in the hope that we would be placed on an equal footing with the other nations in Transylvania. With the Hungarians, Széklers and Saxons. And what did we achieve? Nothing! Everything stayed the same. The people are angry and disappointed."]. The wealthy Romanian farmer Moise Şerban bitterly concludes, explaining to Josef Kornacker that: *Das rumänische Volk in Siebenbürgen wurde von den Österreichern betrogen. Leider sind die Ideale der ungarischen Revolution mißbraucht worden. Kossuth zum Beispiel.*[22] ["The Romanian people in Transylvania were betrayed by the Austrians. Unfortunately, the ideals of the Hungarian revolution have been abused. Kossuth, for example."]. The Revolution had been bloodily suppressed, but some demands were retained, such as the abolition of serfdom, which were laid down in imperial patents. The disappointment was great among the nations which were on the side of the Imperial House. They hoped for a certain autonomy, which was mostly denied to them. In Transylvania, Romanians were particularly affected by this.

The ending seems melodramatic and forced. The author uses the artistic device of *deus ex machina* and has the old count confess his youth sin: the two- the outlaw Josef Kornacker and the young count Josef Zselinsky- are brothers. The author's penchant for historical research seeps through the entire novel: the fleeing Josef often recalls his experiences during the "civil war of 1848/49",[23] the assault on the Turkish redoubts in Serbia, the destruction of the rebels and the conquest of the village of Lipot-Puszta, the execution of the thirteen generals of the Hungarian Revolution in Arad.

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[15] Greffner, *Der einsame Ritter*, 91.
[16] Greffner, *Der einsame Ritter*, 98.
[17] Greffner, *Der einsame Ritter,* 98.
[18] Greffner: *Das Banat*, 78.
[19] Hungarian nobleman, lawyer, journalist, politician, statesman and governor, president of the Kingdom of Hungary during the Revolution of 1848-1849.
[20] Romanian peasants from the Apuseni Mountains.
[21] Greffner, *Der einsame Ritter*, 173.
[22] Greffner, *Der einsame Ritter*, 134.
[23] Greffner*, Der einsame Ritter*, 86.

In the spring of 1899,[24] the large farmers and landlords from Şiria and other communities complained that they had no labourers to cultivate the fields and work the vineyards. The poor farmers and day labourers refused to work, and no longer accepted the prevailing pay and working conditions and went on strike. Greffner dwells on this episode, even if he uses it anachronistically. Diplomatically, the young Count Robert stands up for the right of the *moţi* to equal pay and conditions as other farm labourers, thus resolving the harvest strike. He addresses the worried and unruly day labourers in their mother tongue, Romanian, and is celebrated by them shouting "Traiască Graful!" [Long live the Count].

The character that has inspired the author in his writing, Count Zselinsky-Pallavicini-Nopsca[25] was a real character, originating from a family of patrons who have supported the economic, cultural and educational development of Aradul Nou neighbourhood for a long time. The palace of this noble family on Calea Timişorii is now home to the Forestry Lyceum. A long chapter is devoted to Josef's trial in the county court in Arad.

Greffner reproduces the comprehensive protocol of the case, the main charge of murder, attempted murder and theft against Josef and two other Betyars. A long list of witnesses is given, which serves to confirm the biographical truth. Greffner's style is concise, clear, sparse and sober. The sentences are short, the story is told in an exciting and dynamic way. Flashbacks are Greffner's favourite narrative device in the novel - he remains neutral, his attitude is objective-reporting and dignified. The local colour is preserved - Greffner uses Hungarian sentences and expressions, and often also Romanian words, such as *cioban, bundă, mămăligă, Traiască Graf-ur (sic), Schuba*. His attitude to the problem of several ethnic groups living together seems a little idyllic and naïve; a romanticised view of multiculturalism prevails. Thus *The Lone Rider* can be described as a docufiction, a reproduction of real, documentable historical facts, woven together with Greffner's personal family history and fiction.

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[24] Greffner: *Hellburg-Şiria-Villagos,* Arad: Ziridava 1990, 157.
[25] Otto Greffner and Mario Stoica, "286 de ani de învăţământ în limba germană în Aradul Nou," *Administraţie româmească arădeană. Studii şi comunicări,* vol. 4., Collection *Slaviciana,* „Vasile Goldiş" Arad: University Press (2012): 97.

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MAKING THE NATION VISIBLE:
ART, ARCHITECTURE AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN ROMANIAN SOCIETY

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Rezumat: În contextul procesului de afirmare și construire a națiunilor din secolul al XIX-lea, intelectualii au folosit și integrat arta între mijloacele de prezentare și exprimare a specificului național. De la faimoșii pictori Macchiaioli până la redescoperirea stilului gotic medieval ca simbol al originilor naționale, formele de artă au fost transformate în instrumente puternice care au contribuit la crearea identității naționale și a căror eficacitate se validează încă în spațiul contemporan. Studiul de față propune o abordare interdisciplinară, istorico-antropologică, asupra modului în care arta, în general, și arhitectura în special, au fost utilizate ca parte a discursului național menit să construiască nu doar un sens de apartenență la națiune ci și o artă națională care să accentueze specificitatea și originalitatea membrilor ei în raport cu celelalte națiuni. Obiectivul prezentului demers este de a sonda, în perspectiva istorică, principalele repere în dezvoltarea unei arte naționale prin raportarea la artele majore: arhitectură, sculptură și pictură. Pe lângă contextul istoric, în perspectiva duratei lungi, lucrarea se concentrează și pe examinarea trăsăturilor specifice imaginarului vizual național. De asemenea, studiul face referire și la mijloacele și mecanismele de diseminare a acestei arte naționale, cu scopul de a aprecia eficiența acestora, eficiență validată prin aprecierea măsurii în care românii au recunoscut ca fiind „naționale" creațiile artistice și edificiile studiate pentru prezentul demers.

Abstract: In the context of the process of affirmation and nation-building in the 19th century, intellectuals used and integrated art among the means of presentation and expression of national specificity. From the famous Macchiaioli painters to the rediscovery of the medieval Gothic style as a symbol of national origins, art forms were transformed into powerful tools that contributed to the creation of national identity and whose effectiveness is still valid in the contemporary space. The present study proposes an interdisciplinary, historical-anthropological approach to the way in which art in general, and architecture in particular, have been used as part of the national discourse aimed at constructing not only a sense of belonging to the nation but also a national art that emphasizes the specificity and originality of its members in relation to other nations. The objective of the present approach is to probe, in historical perspective, the main landmarks in the development of a national art by reference to the major arts: architecture, sculpture and painting. In addition to the historical context, in the perspective of long duration, the paper also focuses on examining the specific features of the national visual imaginary. The study also refers to the means and mechanisms of dissemination of this national art, in order to assess their effectiveness, which is validated by the extent to which Romanians have recognised artistic creations and buildings as "national".

Cuvinte-cheie: naționalism, conștiință națională, artă națională, arhitectură, propagandă.

Keywords: nationalism, national consciousness, national art, architecture, propaganda.

This study is an interdisciplinary approach combining the cultural history of art and architecture with studies on nation and nationalism. Our main objective is to examine the process and the extent to which a visual vocabulary was articulated and used within the context of the nation-

building process and the nationalist propaganda in Romanian society. We intend to demonstrate that in Romanian society, the elites considered art as a useful media for creating the national consciousness. We used the theoretical frameworks and methodology applied by scholars who examined the topic for Western society. And, indeed, generous scholarly literature examines the nation-building process, including the mechanisms and media used. Their findings are referential for understanding the complex significance of what a nation and national identity represent. In what the concept of *nation* is concerned, we use those definitions that treat the nation as a cultural construct, *an imagined community*.[1] These definitions allow us to accept and examine the mechanism through which national consciousness and identity were formed, including through visual narratives. Moreover, we also included and tried to apply to the Romanian specificity, the findings and approaches of a constantly growing literature that examines art and architecture from the perspective of the nation-building process.[2] Very relevant for our theoretical framework on Romanian nationalism and the visual culture is the volume by Anthony D. Smith, *Art and National Identity in Western Europe, 1600-1850,* Oxford University Press, 2013, which explores how the concept of the nation was rendered tangible and accessible through images and symbols.[3] The book explores the main elements, phases and scopes which led to the creation of national art and the national visual vocabulary. The author starts his analysis from the pre-modern elements used and (re)interpreted into a national discourse, concluding with the commemorative places, such as war memorials that are also visual, permanent (re)actualizations of national consciousness.

For our case study, we refer to key moments in the national history starting with the creation of the Romanian modern state, in the second half of the XIXth century, mainly the independence and the proclamation of the Romanian Kingdom and the First World War.

The main objective is to demonstrate that a national art was created in this period and as a consequence of these events. Therefore we focused on those events that are definitory in the nation-building process and determine also the articulation and use of a visual national vocabulary. We also tried to examine the origins of what we called "deliberate visual politics" including the public's reactions. For the latter aspect, considering that the nation-building process evolved vertically, we also tried to appreciate whether the elites (including artists) made efforts or considered adapting the narratives to the populations' cultural and education levels, as well, as whether they shared these nationalistic visions on the purpose of art.[4]

Thus, we examined the official discourse, on the part of the central authorities who were among the main beneficiaries of such a nationalistic discourse. We also incorporated historical records of the debates surrounding the establishment and scope of art schools, alongside documentation of the authorities' interventions and decisions regarding specific building projects, and descriptions of public events and exhibitions. Consequently, we argue that multiple actors, phases, and means contributed to the development of a visual narrative that evolved into valuable and effective instruments of national propaganda. This narrative encompasses both formal mechanisms, such as the school system, and informal ones, including exhibitions, art museums and galleries, postcards, stamps, and press articles. We also consider that some of the nationally themed artworks discussed here originated from private artistic initiatives. However, we argue that the majority of these works were subsequently integrated into a visual nationalistic propaganda campaign led by authorities through various means.[5] The process is a double one, as Leoussi argued: "while national ideas have shaped the visual arts, the

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[1] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, New York: Verso, 2006).
[2] Michelle Facos and Sharon L Hirsh, *Art, culture, and national identity in fin-de-siècle Europe* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Athena S. Leoussi, "Art, architecture, and nationalism", in *Research Handbook on Nationalism,* eds. L. Greenfeld and Z. Wu (Oxford: Edward Elgar, 2020).
[3] Anthony D. Smith, *Art and National Identity in Western Europe, 1600-1850* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 1.
[4] We refer to how art was defined and included within the educational means as well as how works of art with a national sense were made accessible to the public.
[5] This refers to a key aspect questioned by Anthony D. Smith, whether these works of art help enhance and promote the nation or are rather visual expressions of the artist's national enthusiasm. We tend to argue that both are possible in the sense that, some works were indeed the result of the artist's enthusiasm however they were then taken and used for promoting the national identity and recognised as such.

visual arts have, in their turn, shaped the self-consciousness and behaviour of national communities, becoming symbols of national unity, identity and purpose."[6]

Viewed systemically, they contributed to the creation of a national imagery still vivid in the collective imagination of Romanians, and to a certain extent to the foreigners as well. This is based on the assumption that any nation finds and uses certain visual symbols in relation to the others. Thus, this self-representation of the Romanian nation was complemented by an external dimension, as the new state needed to identify and employ visual narratives in relation to other nation-states. Beyond the formal symbols, Romania (in that time the United Principalities and the Kingdom of Romania) also appealed and tried to show foreigners its national specificity and character. See for instance all the energies and efforts put into Romanian's participation in the universal and international exhibitions that were organized in the second half of the 19th century. As Anne-Marie Thiesse argued, these events not only presented the most recent technological innovation but were also events to which nations were invited to showcase their identity and traditions in an attractive form.[7] For the Romanian participation, there is the excellent study by Laurențiu Vlad who examined Romania's presence at exhibitions from Paris (1867-1937).[8]

Additionally, beyond the visual means examined in this study, such as paintings, sculptures, and architecture, it is important to recognize that other visual forms were also employed for national propaganda. Among these perhaps the most evocative ones is the use and transformation of folk costume into a national one.[9] As previously argued, an entire system of means was put to work to make the nation visible. Anthony D. Smith compiled a list of all these media: "Through music and dance, poetry and folk ballads, the call of the nations could be `heard`, through the visual arts, painting, sculpture and architecture, but also lately film, television and advertising, the nation, its character, history and destiny, could be paraded before people's eyes, and made to seem vivid, palpable and tangible."[10] Most often, these visual forms are intrinsically linked and achieve their full significance only when used together. One of the most eloquent examples in this context is the Romanian Atheneum, a national opera where all major art forms converged to create a cultural symbol of the Romanian nation. We will explore this example further in the following pages.

In search of a national imagery: nationalizing art and the intersection of art and politics in the late 19th century and the first interwar period

During the 19th century, the expansion and transformation of intellectual and cultural production went hand in hand with its nationalization: literature, painting, music, architecture, and history were from now on defined in national terms.[11] Romanian society will register a similar process, which can relate to the beginnings of the modern state, after the 1859 Union of the Principalities. The creation of the state provided also the means, institutional ones included, for the development of art. The creation of art and architectural schools, despite all the difficulties, the financial aid for the artists through the scholarship system as well as the foundation of art museums and collections confirm that art was invested with a political significance, instrumentalized and used for conveying the message of authority, development and progress in "Western models". It is a double process, in the sense that both the authorities as well as the artists claim that art and architecture are among the domains that reflected the evolution of the state towards modernization. This will be turned into a leitmotiv of all the debates and claims for the necessity of supporting (financially included) the development of national Romanian art. Even the use of such expressions "national art" and "Romanian art" are relevant for the appreciation of the role they had in the national propaganda. In an article written by Dumitru Berindei and published in *Revista Română*, he underlined that: "the arts

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[6] Leoussi, "Art, architecture, and nationalism", 126.

[7] Anne-Marie, Thiesse, *The Transnational creation of national arts and crafts in the 19th century* (Antwerp: NISE, 2013), 15.

[8] Laurentiu Vlad, *Imagini ale indentitatii nationale.România la expozițiile interanționalede la Paris* (1867-1937) (Iaşi: Institutul European, 2007).

[9] Georgeta Fodor, "The National Dimension of Fashion: Women's Traditional Garments as a National Symbol in Romanian Society" in *Fashion through History: Costumes, Symbols, Communication* vol. 1 (Cambridge Scholar, 2018).

[10] Smith, *Art and national identity*, 9.

[11] Thiesse, *The Transnational creation of national arts*, 10.

give the faithful expression of a nation's genius" and that art is the "historical gallery of a nation."[12] In the journal *Analele Arhitecturii și ale Artelor cu care se leagă* such references are frequent. In another article from 1890 signed by Ştefan Ciocârlan, the author, quoting Dumitru Berindei, stated that: "if we aspire to have a role among the educated nations if we are aware of our mission in the East, we must take care of arts as they will educate the spirit and the intellect of Romanians."[13] Ciocârlan also shared this belief, underlying it in another article. From his point of view: "arts will always be useful for the nation."[14]

Moreover, art schools and artists were also made aware of their "national" mission. For example, according to the first regulation of the School of Belle-Arte in Bucharest, issued in 1864, students who received scholarships were required to either create a copy of a famous artwork or present an original piece, which had to feature a "national subject". In 1869, a new regulation was introduced that demanded scholarship recipients to create compositions with historical themes.[15] A few years before, V. A. Urechia, in a petition claiming financial support for opening a national art museum, proposed that painters to be paid for creating national historical paintings.[16] Also, he referred, and this is a practice to be considered part of the state's strategies of instrumentalizing art, the organization of artistic contests. In his *Istoria școalelor de la 1860-1864,* he mentions a proposal to the Ministry Council from 1861 made by Vlădoianu for the creation of a painting dedicated to a historical event the Fight from Teişani (1604).[17]

Therefore, during the era of Al. I. Cuza (1859-1866), art and education, along with libraries and museums, were incorporated into a cultural program aimed at educating and fostering national awareness among the nation's people.[18] We can complete the list with contests, exhibitions and public conferences. They all had pronounced national valences. Indeed, the decisions and initiatives during the reign of Cuza will be visible only after two, or three decades.[19] So it was King Carol I of Romania (1866-1914) to beneficiate and continue the visual propaganda. For the king and his entourage, the stake was doubled. Besides the legitimation of his regime on the international level, he also had to justify it and gain the support of the country. So, deliberate visual politics, including architectural programs were started by the royal family. The king made efforts to build an image of unity and legitimacy of his regime. Therefore, he adopted, like other 19th-century European monarchs, both a personal style and the ritual of celebrations and festivals. These efforts are evident in the construction of royal residences such as the one in Bucharest and Peleş Castle, as well as in the undertaking of monumental projects designed to commemorate significant moments in Romanian history and the central role the king played in them.[20]

So, the modern Romanian state instrumentalized art to support its goals, and Romanian artists from the second half of the 19th century recognized and embraced their mission, fully assuming the roles they were called to fulfil.[21]

Didactic and evocative: making the nation visible through painting and sculptures

In the selection we analysed, we refer to and use Anthony D. Smith's definition of "national" imagery` which refers to: "images and symbols that are widely perceived to embody ideas of the nation and kindle national sentiments, whatever the original motivation of the artist"[22] as well as Leoussi who defines "national art" as a "particular category of art that focuses on national subjects

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[12] Dumitru Berindei, „Despre arte și despre cultura lor in Ţara Românească," *Revista Română,* 1862, republished in *Analele Arhitecturii și ale artelor cu care se leagă*, I, 5 (1890): 109.

[13] Ştefan Ciocârlan, „Dumitru Berindei," *Analele Arhitecturii*, I, no. 1 (1890): 4-5. The author was an architect, a graduate of the French Ecole de Beaux Arts, and editor of the journal.

[14] Ştefan Ciocârlan, „Arhitectura si scolile de belle-arte," *Analele Arhitecturii*, I, no. 2 (1890): 25.

[15] *Arta din România*, 174.

[16] *Arta din România*, 174.

[17] V. A. Urechia, *Istoria școalelor de la 1860-1864* (Bucureşti, Imprimeria Statului, 1894), 269.

[18] Aurica Ichim, „Constituirea patrimoniului Pinacotecii din Iaşi în timpul domniei lui Cuza," *Cercetări istorice. Muzeul Naţional Moldova*, Iaşi (2013): 324.

[19] Ichim, „Constituirea patrimoniului ...," 324.

[20] Maria Bucur, *Eroi şi victime. România şi memoria celor doua războaie mondiale* (Iaşi: Polirom, 2019), 42.

[21] Alin Ciupală, „Arta şi naţiune de la epoca paşoptista la Primul război Mondial," *Dilema Veche*, 23-29 martie, 2017.

[22] Smith, *Art and national identity*, 2.

and national styles."[23] These broad definitions encompass painting genres such as history painting, portraits, and landscape representations. As far as sculpture is concerned, we included in our analysis, references to the equestrian statues and busts dedicated to leaders who personify national heroes and relate to important moments from national history. For architecture, we refer to buildings recognized for their national style or invested with national significance, such as the Romanian Atheneum. Note that, as well as Anthony D. Smith argued, certain works of art can be termed as being national more easily than others. These include official commissions for sculptural monuments to the nation's heroes fallen in battle or scenes from the national history.[24]

A debate on the relation between architecture, painting and sculpture also exists in modern Romanian society. If all agree that works of art give the "measure of a nation's spirit",[25] divergent opinions tend to appear when the discussion turns to the importance played by each art and to their functionality. Architects tend to argue that architecture is the major art form and the only one that has a practical function as compared to sculpture and painting which are "just for the spirit."[26] Consequently, there are also historical records that reveal a tendency of some authors to argue that only painting and sculpture possess pronounced didactic and evocative functions.[27] For instance, in an argument related to a painting contest from 1861, the contest regulations asserted that the role of arts is: "to awaken noble and generous sentiments in people's hearts. When artworks energetically and skilfully depict the glorious events of a nation, they inspire and strengthen patriotism and encourage enlightened patriotism and true, earnest national development."[28]

In the same line of thought, a third-year student at the School of Belle-Arte from Bucharest stated, about the painting that it has an evocative purpose, that `the sculpture and painting were for a long period the only way to tell history. and knowing and cultivating the past was a key element of the creation of national consciousness.[29] `Within this process, the painting, in the first place was favoured as the means to make the nation `visible`. Therefore, within this historical context already, historical paintings, portraits, allegorical representations as well as representations of the rural countryside and its inhabitants were invested with a national significance.

In the Romanian case, the national features are visible in the artworks created within the context, and as a consequence of two important moments in the nation-building process. These two are the 1848 revolution and 1859, the year that marked the union of the two principalities, Moldavia and Wallachia. The list of events is to be completed with the 1877-1878 War of Independence, which favoured the emergence of a new type of national art, the commemorative one.

The first two events fuelled the fertile imagination of many Romanian artists. We refer to the most renowned artists and their works, as their prominence and presence in the collective imagination of Romanians support our claims regarding both the accessibility of visual narratives and the effectiveness of propaganda tools used to create such imagery. Among the most famous artists are painters such as Constantin Daniel Rosenthal, Gheorghe Tattarescu, Theodor Aman, and Nicolae Grigorescu. These artists made the abstract concept of the nation tangible and visible. Through their works, the nation, as an abstract notion, was rendered accessible in the concrete form of feminine allegories.[30] C. D. Rosenthal did this when painting *Revolutionary Romania* and *Romania Breaking off Her Chains on the Field of Liberty*. Both paintings were inspired by the 1848 revolution and can be included in the almost canonical representation of the nation as female allegories. Gheorghe Tattarescu also painted an allegory, *The Reveille of Romania*. Notably during the contemporary period, this work was known under the name *National Resurrection*.[31] It was part of the artworks taken at the international exhibitions from 1867 (Paris) and Vienna (1873) which is also relevant for

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[23] Leoussi, *Art, architecture, and nationalism*, 126.
[24] Leoussi, *Art, architecture, and nationalism*, 9.
[25] Verussi, „Despre arta națională." *Convorbiri* literare, 1875. Republished in *Analele Arhitecturii*, no. 8 (1891): 144.
[26] Verussi, „Despre arta națională."
[27] As we will see when discussing about architecture, architects tend to promote that buildings are more than just functional and that their symbolic significance is as powerful as the one of the other major arts.
[28] Urechia, *Istoria școalelor*, 269.
[29] D. Demetru Georgescu, „Arta si importanta ei," *Analele Arhitecturii*, no. 11 (1891): 189.
[30] Georgeta Fodor, "Woman as a Nation's Symbol: The Romanian Case," *Brukenthalia. Romanian Cultural History Review*, no.4 (2012): 101-109.
[31] Adrian Silvan-Ionescu, „Școala de Belle-Arte. Exposițiunea Artiștilor în Viață și mișcarea artistică instituțională", *Arta din România. Din preistorie în contemporaneitate* (București-Cluj-Napoca: Mega, 2018), 173.

the impact and the audience of this type of subject, strengthening its symbolic value besides the artistic one.

Tattarescu also painted historical portraits, including the one of the revolutionary Nicolae Bălcescu. And portraits were an important means of national propaganda as viewers could easily identify and associate historical national events with real personalities.

As previously mentioned, sometimes imagined and other times real, the concepts of union and nation were often represented as portraits of females. Tattarescu's depiction of the Union from 1859 is rather abstract (Photo 1) when compared with the one by Theodor Aman. Aman's *The Union of the Principalities* depicts two young women dressed in folk, national costumes (Photo 2). This work was already exhibited in the art gallery in Iași during the 1860s. Nicolae Grigorescu will also create a female version of the Union (Photo 3).

These painters will set a pattern, as from their example other similar personifications emerged culminating with the paintings made by Costin Petrescu in the Romanian Atheneum where Romania and the three recently united provinces are also personified.[32] After the Great War, such allegories of the Nation will appear also in public monuments.[33] We will refer to it when analysing national sculpture.

Besides the allegories of the nation, when discussing Theodor Aman one must refer to the highly symbolic nature of his historical paintings whose national valences were correctly identified by artists and authorities. Theodor Aman, for instance was among those who considered that historical painting was the major genre, rendering the most prominent figures and events from the medieval and modern history of Romanians. Note that, as we all know, Aman was the official artist of the state. He was among the founders of the national school of fine arts, founded in 1864, and in 1881, he was also tasked with sketching the royal insignia.[34] His depiction of historical subjects gave him the uncontested title of the Romanian historical painter by excellence. However, a nationalistic message must also be attributed to his works representing the rural, the countryside, topics approached by the artist in the 1870s. Indeed, this rurality is an idealistic one, and avoids dealing with marginality and the poor living conditions.[35] However, this idealisation is perhaps part of Aman's vision of nation and the state he wished to convey for the public.

Besides allegorical artworks, such as those created by C. D. Rosenthal, Th. Aman, and Gh. Tattarescu, perhaps even more impactful were the representations of the rural countryside and its people, which came to be invested with national significance. From all Romanian artists, it was Nicolae Grigorescu who was acknowledged as the "national painter", a title earned due to his depictions of the rural, national countryside. According to Alin Ciupală: "ironically or not, in Romania of the Old Kingdom, it was not Aman—the painter, the rector of the Academy of Arts in Bucharest, the president of the Official Salon—who was recognized as the national painter despite his remarkable achievements, but Nicolae Grigorescu."[36] And he is still acknowledged as such. Although he also painted historical subjects, such as those inspired by the Medieval ruler *Mihai Viteazul* (1593-1601), his fame, since his lifetime owes to his depictions of Romanian landscapes. In a contemporary description of his works, Grigorescu is credited for being "the painter of his country" as "nobody has better depicted (through painting) the cheerful and harsh, graceful or grand appearances, from the horizons of the plains… to the Carpathians."[37] The curator of Aman Museum, Georgescu Victorian also characterized Grigorescu as the "painter of the country's nature". This is the one that made his reputation of being the national painter,[38] a reputation that amplified and remains unchanged until nowadays.

As for the historical, national subjects, where did the artists find their inspiration is another subject we addressed. In some historical records we analysed, authors give information about these

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[32] Georgeta Fodor, „Prezențe feminine în mitologia istorică românească – perspective și stereotipuri de gen," *Acta Marisiensis. Seria Historia*, 4 (2022): 63-85.

[33] Georgeta Fodor, "Female Representations and Presences in Romanian First World War Commemorative Art," *Territorial Identity and Development*, 7, no. 2 (2022): 29-53.

[34] Adrian-Silvan Ionescu, „Aman, între conștiința istorică și hedonism," *Ziarul Financiar*, no. 6, 2011.

[35] Silvan-Ionescu, „Școala de Belle-Arte", 180.

[36] Ciupală, „Artă și națiune …".

[37] A review of the book *Esquisses roumanie*, by L. Bachelin, in *Literatura și arta română*, 7, I, no. 6 (1896-1897): 514.

[38] Georgescu Victorian, „Pictura noastră,", *Literatura și arta română*, 12, no. 1-3, (1908): 292-293.

sources. Besides historical and field documentation, we learned that some artists were inspired by literary works. For instance, both Aman and Grigorescu used the works of Dimitrie Bolintineanu to depict historical episodes from the lives of medieval rulers such as *Vlad Tepeş* and *Mihai Viteazul*.[39] This is noteworthy as it reveals, on one hand, how influential was this type of literary work in the period, and, on the other, that we are dealing with an intertwined media used for conveying this image of a triumphal past and great leaders, which is a compulsory part in the national imagery. These interactive media ensure that such historical figures enter the national pantheon of heroes.

Of course, the question of the reception of these artworks as symbolic renderings or allusions to the nation and national specificity is more complex than that. We will try to address it, however, not before considering sculpture, mainly public monuments, which must also be included among the efficient and powerful instruments of national propaganda, especially considering the wider audience that could be targeted. This employs some historical consideration of the tradition of public monuments in the Romanian space as well as the debates on their importance as we encountered in the historical sources analysed dating from the last decades of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th.

In what the three dimensional art of sculpture is concerned, particularly regarding public monuments, only with the instauration of the monarchy and after the War of Independence can we discuss about interests in commissioning public monuments with a commemorative function. However, only the Great War brought about what one would call a veritable campaign of building war monuments, as a result of both public and private initiatives. The need for war memorials was thoroughly examined by Maria Bucur,[40] and as the author underlined, they became national symbols, integrated in the national imagery as places of national solidarity and triumph against the enemies. The importance of such public monuments was stated by some authors even before the era of modern wars. Petru Versussi for instance, a few years before the War of Independence, in 1875 wrote in the journal *Convorbiri Literare* that: "each nation searches the means to perpetuate the deeds that prove its greatness: that it uses bronze and marble, personifying them for future generations as testimonies for the nation's greatness."[41]

After the War of Independence, several communities collected funds for commemorative monuments.[42] A notable one is the one from Ploieşti, the first dedicated to war heroes, unveiled in 1897. Although it makes use of an ancient, classical vocabulary (the obelisk and the allegorical figure of Victory), it also includes national symbols such as the flag, the eagle as well as the oak wreath.[43] (Photo 4) Other monuments, also erected by local initiative, can be found in Tulcea. Here an obelisk flanked by a soldier and an eagle was initiated in 1879. The monument was finished in 1899, but the official inauguration took place much later, in 1904, in the presence of King Carol I and Queen Elisabeta. Another obelisk marking the war was erected in the rural community of Şuraia, Vrancea county, dating from 1904.[44] On the necessity of such monuments to commemorate the war, public opinions were expressed as well. For instance, in an article from 1902, an initiative in the Deputies Chamber on the necessity of building a monument at Plevna was described as "an act of patriotism."[45]

Within the context, an interesting, nationalist aspect emerges that is about the commissioning of such monuments (it will include also the question of designing public, national buildings). Some authors considered that such projects which concerned or having a national significance should be given to artists and architects of Romanian nationality. The author of the article we refer to, stated that a monument meant to glorify the courage of the nation could only be made by a Romanian artist.[46] This idea is argued through a reference he made to an example of a bad choice. From the author's

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[39] Iacob Negruzzi, „Galeria de tablouri,". *Convorbiri Literare*, 1 (1867): 9-10. Mentions that Aman used for *Ţepeş and the Ottoman ambassadors* the ballad of D. Bolintineanu whereas the one with Stephen the Great was inspired by one of V. Alecsandri's poems about the Putna Monastery. As for Grigorescu, the painting with Mihai Viteazul is from D. Bolintineanu, poem. Even the title is similar.

[40] Bucur, *Eroi si victime*, 43.

[41] Verussi, „Despre arta nationala", 144.

[42] Bucur, *Eroi si victime*, 43.

[43] Bucur, *Eroi si victime*, 43.

[44] Analytical file of the moment accessible at https://www.europeana.eu/ro/item/330/Eroi_MON_38_510 accessed June 11, 2024.

[45] Zet, „Monumentul independentei," *Literatura şi arta*, 1, no. 7, (1902): 2.

[46] Zet, „Monumentul independentei", 2.

perspective, the decision to commission a French artist, Jean Camille Formigé, to design the Romanian pavilion at the 1900 International Exhibition, explains why it failed to capture the national specificity.[47] However, monuments will still be commissioned to foreign sculptors, and their nationality was not an obstacle in rendering and using Romanian national symbolism. The great era of these commemorative monuments will start after the Great War, and they will all share national elements like flags, folk costumes, military uniforms, and wreath leaves. The fact that lots of them were erected at the initiative of local communities, accentuated the sense of solidarity, national pride and unity.[48] For sure, the memorial from Mărăşeşti stands out of all, both for including all major art forms but also due to the public efforts that joined for its creation.

In addition to commemorative monuments dedicated to war heroes, public spaces were also populated by monuments honouring historical figures. Among these, equestrian statues are perhaps the most impressive. They were used to represent notable historical figures such as Mihai Viteazul and the kings. The first monument of this type in Bucharest was created by Albert-Ernest Carrier-Belleuse. Notably, the statue of Mihai Viteazul was crafted in Paris, based on documentation provided by Alexandru Odobescu and Theodor Aman, and was installed in Bucharest in 1874 (Photo 5). This medieval hero received considerable attention during the communist period, with statues erected in Transylvanian cities like Alba Iulia (1968), Sibiu (1968), and Cluj (1976). Post-1989, similar initiatives continued, resulting in equestrian statues in Târgovişte (2001), Giurgiu (2011), and Târgu Mureş (2011, 2013). While this research does not provide a comprehensive list, the aforementioned examples sufficiently demonstrate the significant role that monuments of certain historical figures play in the visual nationalistic vocabulary.

Architecture: the quest for a national architectural style

Compared to paintings and sculptures, which were, at least during the modern period, less accessible to a wider public, architecture was more open to public engagement. Adina Nanu encapsulates this idea saying that the street is an open-air museum.[49] However, the immediacy and depth of the messages conveyed by artworks and architecture vary from one viewer to another. In the case of buildings, there is a spectrum of understanding that ranges from simple recognition of function to detailed expertise in forms and styles. Despite the level of comprehension, the national dimension of architecture reveals itself even in its functional aspects.

Moreover, when it comes to the stylistic choices of public buildings and official institutions, such as parliamentary buildings, the architectural style is part of the political statement that authorities intend to convey. Like paintings, public monuments, and buildings, through their grandeur and stylistic choices, serve as diplomatic means of representing the state to others. Even common people associate iconic buildings with their respective states and societies: the Louvre for France, the Hermitage for Russia, the Parthenon for Greece, and the pyramids for Egypt, among others. Thus, whether they are archaeological sites or modern structures, architecture has played a defining role in the promotion and expression of national self-consciousness.[50]

Architecture, as a prominent and enduring form of cultural expression, played a crucial role in this quest for national identity and not only in Romanian modern society. Across Europe, architects sought to create styles that resonated with national histories and cultural traditions while addressing contemporary needs. In Western Europe, this movement manifested in various *revival* styles. For instance, in Germany, architects embraced the Gothic revival as a symbol of national heritage and identity recalling the medieval origins of the people. In France, the Beaux-Arts style, which emphasized grandeur and classical influences, became a means of showcasing national pride and modernity. Similarly, in Eastern Europe, countries like Hungary and Poland saw the emergence of national styles that drew upon medieval and folk traditions, reflecting a broader cultural renaissance and a reclaiming of national identity from foreign domination.

Architects examined the past in search for inspiration, to identify the roots and to delineate the directions to be followed in order to create and affirm a "national architectural style". This step

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[47] Zet, „Monumentul independentei", 2.

[48] Fodor, "Female Representations and Presences…".

[49] Adina Nanu, *Vezi? Comunicarea prin imagine* (Bucureşti: Didactica şi Pedagogică, 2018), 152.

[50] Leoussi, *Art, architecture, and nationalism*, 130.

represents the natural path of development of a nation through awareness of its national values. This transformation is essential for thinking and is an intensely exploited moment by architects. To note also that the authentic picturesque architectural element is constant, regardless of its styles. The statement is valid also for Romanian architecture. Above all, this is a domain that is highly debated, perhaps even more than sculpture and paintings, and not only because it is considered the major art form but mainly because it was the functional art that could best summon the progress and modernization of society which were main keys on the political agenda. The profoundness of the issue went to the point of rethinking the cities, as to prove that Romania is a modern country. In Romania, these concerns and priorities also determined the quest for a national architectural style as a symbol of national identity. As with the progress of arts in general, the Romanian style of architecture was deeply intertwined with the country's political and social transformations. As previously argued, the unification of the Romanian Principalities and the subsequent establishment of the Romanian Kingdom in 1881 provided a fertile ground for a cultural renaissance. In architecture, this movement with an original character, and with a theoretically coherent programme, crystallized itself in modern Romanian national culture as a "Neo-Romanian national style". It is part of romantic thought, where the sources of expression are inspired by the architecture of the past.

In terms of ideas translated into projects, it is an eclectic architecture, giving architects the freedom to choose from the past. The interest in the vernacular and the traditional, combined with the spirit of innovation – the main concepts of Art Nouveau – can be found in those Romanian architects who created this new national style. They intensely debated the paths to be followed starting from examining the origins and militating for the intervention of public authorities to support and protect local, national initiatives. Romanian architects sought to create an architectural language that was uniquely Romanian, reflecting the nation's historical and folk traditions while embracing modern architectural principles. This endeavour led to the emergence of the Neo-Romanian style, which became a symbol of national pride and cultural continuity. By examining the journals, one can have a partial image of the complexity of the debates on the quest and necessity of finding a national, Romanian style of architecture. For instance, in *Analele Arhitecturii*, edited in the 1890s the debates evolved up to the point of considering that only Romanian architects were able to create buildings that reflect the national specificity. For instance, while discussing the projects for the Parliament's building a suggestion was made that in the future all public buildings be made in Romanian architecture, and that international architecture contests be replaced by national ones. The discussion gets to another level when it comes to the building of the cathedral of Bucharest, where architects and church authorities joined forces for the project to be given to Romanian architects: "The cathedral is the most important monument of the country… the foreigners cannot be given the project of creating the monument that symbolizes our belief and national greatness."[51]

Despite the architects´ and intellectuals´ nationalism manifested in public debates, they also accepted the eclectic solution. More importantly, this was not necessarily (and by all) perceived as being contradictory to the national specificity. The national character was to be found in the medieval monuments, in their decorative motifs. And above all, the monastery from Curtea de Arges was an iconic reference for all. As one author describes it: "Among all the country's churches, there is a single one worthy of the art of architecture, the monastery from Curtea de Arges,… it is for our architecture as a shining star is on the darkest sky… the monastery's architecture is poetry."[52] (Photo 6) In spite of its internationality, the result, considering also the chosen location in the urban setting, the use of paintings and sculptures as well the functionality, favoured in most cases the perception of the buildings as having a national dimension. Also worth mentioning is that, although the Romanian National architecture style involves extremes based on copying the noteworthy assemblies of the past, it also leaves enough room to express the personalities of the architects themselves; the inspiration drawn from traditional, classical, and vernacular components being mixed with individual style.

As generally acknowledged, and having been recognized as such during his lifetime, Ion Mincu is credited as having an important role in finding, creating, and promoting the Neo-Romanian style. Educated at the prestigious École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, Mincu was exposed to a wide array of architectural styles and theories. However, one of the constant themes in Mincu's work was the

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[51] *Analele Arhitecturii*, no. 6, (1891): 106.
[52] Verussi, „Despre arta …", 144.

concern for creating a new style that would incorporate elements of Romanian peasant and religious architecture. As confessing to N. Petrașcu, who authored the first monograph dedicated to Mincu, in 1928 his desire was to: "start a national art, with things and motifs similar to our old buildings being aware of all the difficulties of adapting this style to the modern necessities."[53] Therefore, he embarked on a mission to develop an architectural language that resonated with the nation's cultural heritage while addressing contemporary needs. Therefore, Mincu's work is characterized by a synthesis of traditional Romanian motifs and modern architectural techniques.

The Neo-Romanian style is distinguished by several key characteristics. It incorporates elements from medieval Romanian architecture, such as the Brâncovenesc style, which includes intricate wood carvings, stone masonry, and decorative ceramics. These traditional motifs were reinterpreted and adapted to contemporary architectural forms, creating a sense of continuity with the past while addressing modern needs. The style represents a synthesis of vernacular and academic influences, blending local architectural traditions with the formal principles of Beaux-Arts education. Buildings often feature floral and geometric patterns derived from Romanian folklore and history, serving as visual representations of national identity. Additionally, the style emphasizes harmony with the natural environment, using local materials and adapting to the Romanian landscape.

Overall, Mincu succeeded in incorporating all the ideals of a generation of Romanian architects and intellectuals who believed that a Romanian style existed and could be adapted to the modern context as a new expression of "the nation's genius". Mincu's merit is recognized by N. Iorga who characterized him most positively, and from a nationalistic perspective: "In old times, when the fashion of servile imitation ruled almost everyone, he dared to admire the architectural monuments of our past... He had the insight needed to discover their originality and the great talent required for them to inspire new, large civil buildings suited to the needs of another era. He had an overwhelming merit for the development of national culture."[54]

Mincu's architectural oeuvre includes several landmark buildings that exemplify the Neo-Romanian style. He started with a private commission, in 1886 when he was asked by Iacob Lahovary to improve his small residence. The building received new interior partitions and an exterior image with modern decorations of various inspirations. As for the public oeuvre, notable among these are the Central School for Girls (1890-1892), Bufetul de la Șosea (1892), and his residence, the House of Architect Ion Mincu (1894-1896). Each of these buildings showcases the integration of traditional Romanian decorative elements with modern structural frameworks, reflecting the fusion of historical and contemporary influences that define the Neo-Romanian style.

The Central School for Girls (Photo 7) is particularly significant, as it demonstrates Mincu's ability to blend traditional Romanian motifs with modern educational architecture. The building features ornamental brickwork, wooden balconies, and floral motifs, creating a sense of national pride and cultural identity. Bufetul de la Șosea, a public building in Bucharest, is notable for its incorporation of traditional Romanian design elements, such as wooden beams and ceramic tiles, into a modern urban context. This building serves as a prominent example of how Mincu adapted vernacular architecture for public use (Photo 9). Mincu's own residence stands testimony to his architectural philosophy, integrating traditional Romanian architectural features with modern amenities to create a harmonious blend of old and new.

In addition to Ion Mincu, other architects contributed to the development and popularization of the Neo-Romanian style. Petre Antonescu (1873-1965), a contemporary of Mincu, played a significant role in promoting the style through his work on major public buildings, including the University of Bucharest and the Ministry of Public Works. Like Mincu, Antonescu drew upon traditional Romanian motifs and blended them with modern architectural techniques, further establishing the Neo-Romanian style as a symbol of national identity. Another notable figure was Nicolae Ghica-Budești (1869-1943), whose work also exemplified the principles of the Neo-Romanian style. Ghica-Budești's designs, such as the Museum of the Romanian Peasant, showcased his commitment to integrating traditional Romanian architectural elements with modern functionality, contributing to the cultural and architectural renaissance in Romania.

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[53] N. Petrașcu, *Ioan Mincu* (Bucuresti: Cultura Nationala, 1928), 11.
[54] N. Iorga, *Scrieri despre arta* (București: Meridiane, 1968), 281. Iorga wrote the text on the occasion of Mincu's death, in 1912. -.

The impact of Ion Mincu and his contemporaries on Romanian architecture and national identity was profound. Their work inspired a generation of architects who continued to develop and refine the Neo-Romanian style, contributing to a broader cultural renaissance in Romania. The style became a symbol of national pride and cultural continuity, influencing the design of public buildings, residences, and cultural institutions. It provided a visual representation of Romanian identity, linking the present to the past and fostering a sense of unity and pride among the Romanian people.

Media and reception: making the nation visible

The analysis would not be complete without examining the reactions and the level of understanding of these visual messages in a national dimension. We searched the historical records to see whether the contemporaries and the next generations perceived these artworks and architectural creations as being Romanian. To this end, one must examine also the purpose and functions these artworks were given by the artists or their commissioners. Anthony D. Smith discusses three main headings under which national imagery can be investigated, and we argue that these are the main functions of national art: didactic and realistic, evocative and spiritual and commemorative as the art of veneration and solidarity.[55] Of course, the functions also vary in relation to the target public. Visual vocabulary tends to be considered as being more accessible even to the illiterate ones, but when we refer to the second half of the nineteenth century and until the interwar period, the illiteracy and the predominance of people in the rural media, made such works as paintings and sculptures have a rather exclusivist, limited public. However, with the existing constraints, the echoes of these artworks in contemporary society can give us a glimpse into the national valances they were invested with. Moreover, intellectuals who believed that art could serve a didactic-national function sometimes recommended that artistic creations be adapted to the educational level of the viewers. For instance, Demetru Georgescu, in an article published in *Analele Arhitecturii*, argued that common people lacking an artistic education would not understand what they see, thereby diminishing the educational value aimed at promoting morality, goodness, and beauty. Instead, he recommended focusing on historical and evocative episodes. His recommendations are the following: "Show him Mihai Viteazul on horseback and tell him: 'This was our most formidable lord in battles...' or show him Eliade and tell him that this is the man who knew how to elevate us to the life of civilized nations... then our man will be in his element. Who, upon entering an art gallery and seeing those battles, those great pages from the life of our homeland so truthfully depicted by our great artist Aman, has not felt their heart beating? This is the purpose of art, to move us through noble ideas and feelings."[56]

Sometimes, not all viewers appreciate the artistic quality of the artworks. However, even when they tend to see them with a critical eye, the national optics are present. For instance, Iacob Negruzzi, critically described Theodor Aman's three paintings that were exhibited in the Paintings Gallery from Iași, in the 1860s. However, his critical eye is also based on the painter's anachronism and inappropriateness of treating such important historical subjects: "In *Unirea* the expression of physiognomies is, however, completely melancholic. Looking at them, you wouldn't believe they are imbued with the truth of the verse: in us two a single soul beats, but rather their souls seem like fading and they also seem like looking with sadness towards a woeful future."[57] In the painting *Stephen the Great and the Archer*, the ruler does not look like "the brave leader that terrifies his enemies but rather as a tired soldier leaning on his bow and gazing indifferently at viewers."[58] Whereas, in the third painting, *Vlad Tepeș and the Ottoman Ambassadors*, it would be quite good if the painter hadn't made two mistakes: the first is the layout, in a sort of gothic style (.) whereas the second is the artist's choice to place in the middle of the room, two columns in a Greek style as well as the choice to represent in the painting contemporary personalities, himself included, which Negruzzi finds disturbing.[59]

But this was rather the critical view of an expert. And even experts give credit to works with national value. Relevant is for instance what N. Petarascu wrote about his visits made with Ion Mincu to the monasteries of Argeș, Horezu and Cozia. While crossing the countryside, it seemed to him that

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[55] Smith, *Art and national identity*, 2.
[56] Georgescu, „Arta si importanta ei", 190.
[57] Negruzzi, „Galeria cu tablouri …", 10.
[58] Negruzzi, „Galeria cu tablouri …", 10.
[59] Negruzzi, „Galeria cu tablouri …", 10.

the landscapes and peasants were "visions of Grigorescu."[60] So educated or not, contemporaries credited Aman and Grigorescu as national painters for their artworks depicting different sides of national specificity: its glorious past and the idyllic, rural countryside where the true spirit of the nation can be found.

As for artists and how they understood the national mission, it is a subject that needs further study. However, from the records we examined, some general remarks can be made. Theodor Aman's house from Bucharest or the one of Ion Mincu can reveal their vision on art and its nationalistic purpose. In Aman's case, his house is a real "political and cultural testament".[61] The most eloquent examples of national consciousness and a sense of pride are embodied in the wall's monumental paintings. Those on the wall represent scenes from the famous battle against the Turks, from Călugăreni. *Mihai Viteazul* is painted with the national flag, an anachronism that seemed not to bother the artist, or the viewers. Notably for the general reception of these artworks, initially, only for private delight,[62] is that it was soon transformed in a Museum. On the occasion, Alexandru Tzigara-Samurcas wrote about Aman: "He is the first painter to actively participate in all social events, putting art in the service of the national cause. The patriotic poetry and ancient legends that fuelled the enthusiasm of those times also inspired the subjects of his numerous canvases. Through him, the figures of Mihai Viteazul and Ștefan cel Mare were popularized. He is the painter of the union and the proclamation of Prince Carol."[63]

As far as public monuments were concerned, the fact that some of them were erected on private initiative reveals also how important they were for the society, reflecting the need of communities to have places for commemorative practices, for visualising the loses they suffered For instance, out of the 50-60 monuments built during the reign of Carol I, the majority were the result of local initiatives.[64] The preference for depicting historical figures or events is also relevant for the national sentiment artists tried to potentiate. In this sense, perhaps the most evocative and rich in national significance is the commemorative art created after the Great War. We argue that it worked as a real catalyst of national identity.[65] War monuments are diverse in form and dimensions, however, they share this common feature: they speak not only about the tragic loss of life but also of the sacrifice for the nation, for the country. Usually, they do this in a simple visual way: soldiers, crosses, women dressed in folk costumes etc., a language understood by everyone.

As for architecture, although Mincu is credited for the creation and promotion of the neo-Romanian style, as previously argued, sometimes even buildings in a neo-classical or eclectic style are conveyed and acknowledged as having a national significance for the common people. For instance, Aman's house is also in neo-classical style. However national imagery predominates (Photo 10).

Referring to public buildings, we argue that the Atheneum from Bucharest is iconic of how elites understood to convey a nationalistic message. The entire project of construction was meant to channel the nation's solidarity through the so famous call: "one *leu* for the Atheneum", by which Romanians were invited to support financially the initiative of the Society for the Romanian Atheneum established in 1885 by Constantin Esarcu. It was meant and worked as a cultural space, built in neoclassical style but, in the long run, it got several nationalistic features, that transformed it into what I. Zamifirescu named as being "the building of the nation's patrimony,… The walls of the Athenaeum simultaneously denote history, faith, wisdom, patriotism, a spirit of diligence, a will for culture, perseverance, and, in a word, Romanian decency."[66]

If the style of architecture does not have an explicit national message, the figurative elements do. First, we refer to the medallions representing the medieval rulers: Neagoe Basarab, Alexandru cel Bun, Vasile Lupu, Matei Basarab, that are still in the national pantheon of historical figures and one

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[60] Patrascu, *Ion Mincu*, 31.
[61] Greta Suteu, „Casa Aman- testament politic si cultural," *Contemporanul,* 4 February, 2021.
[62] Although Aman used to organise social events for his entourage, so the decoration was not just for family members.
[63] Alexandru Tzigara-Samurcas, „Opera si viata lui Aman," *Literatura și arta română*, 18 (1903): 217-218.
[64] Bucur, *Eroi si victime*, 43.
[65] Fodor, "Female Representations and Presences…".
[66] I. Zamfirescu, „Ateneul roman. Capitol de istorie culturală românească," in *Ateneul roman*, eds. I. Zamfirescu, V. Candea and V. Moga (Bucuresti: Enciclopedică, 1976), 13.

representing King Carol I, who also got an equestrian statue in the proximity of the Atheneum.[67] However, nothing compares to the monumental fresco made by Costin Petrescu with 25 scenes rendering the "national epic". When it was unveiled, Constantin Anghelescu said: "From now on, in this ceremonial hall of the Romanian Athenaeum, at every performance, at every cultural event, there will always stand before the spectators and the audience a lesson in national history, a lesson in high patriotism."[68]

Noteworthy is that in the front of the building, there is the statue of the poet Mihai Eminescu, the national poet of Romanians. Moreover, even today the building is described as a symbol of national culture.[69] Put it in the urban context, this dialogue of buildings, sculptures and paintings with an intended and recognized national significance, in the heart of Bucharest is the result of almost a century of accumulation and development of a visual national vocabulary.

Moreover, despite how limited the access during contemporary times to these artworks might have been, especially to the paintings, things will change progressively because of the evolution of a centralized educational system. The visual narrative, articulated during the second half of the 19th century and the first decades of the interwar period, will step into school textbooks and educational strategies recommended by the ministry. For instance, during the interwar period, schools from Transylvania were recommended to buy or acquire historical paintings, portraits mainly, to represent the heroes who sacrificed for the country.[70] The same authorities recommended for the schools the volume edited by N. A. Constantinescu, *Albumul Istoriei Românilor*.[71] The volume was a history of Romanians, including a large amount of visual material that was considered to be "a valuable book for cultivating the national sentiment."[72]

The practices and the national imagery did not change significantly during the communist regime either. For instance, in the textbooks edited during the communist regime and even in present-day school textbooks the same visual narrative can be seen.[73] Images of medieval rulers such as Mihai Viteazul and allegories of Romania as those painted by C. D. Rosenthal or the *Proclamation of the Union* by Th. Aman or the monument for Mărăşeşti etc. became visual teaching support for a national history.

Moreover, since the interwar period until today, visits to the national museums,[74] school trips to historic monuments as well as all the commemorative ceremonies around such public monuments as those dedicated to war heroes contributed and still do to the formation and the permanent reinforcement of national identity. This "official support" ensured the creation and permanence of art and artists perceived as national. These strategies prove right Anthony D. Smith's assumption that the immediate reception of these works is not that relevant. Vital for the gestation of the visual creation of the nation is – he argued - the accumulation of a series of images over a longer period and recognized by the later generations as being national.[75]

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[67] By the same theory of Smith, national imagery transcends its creators. Atheneum is in the hot spot of Bucharest, the Revolution Square alongside with two other iconic buildings, The National Museum of Art (the former Royal Palace) and the University Library (Carol I Library of the University Foundation). Moreover, the Square is dominated by the equestrian monument of the king, in 1939.

[68] Zamfirescu, „Ateneul roman," 83.

[69] This is the text that one can find on the main page of the institution, relevant also for its national symbolism unchanged from its foundations https://www.fge.org.ro/istoricateneu, accessed the 2nd of June 2024.

[70] National Archives. Mureş. Unirea High School Fond, File 30, 511. Ministry order no. 21.

[71] National Archives. Mureş. Unirea High School Fond, File 30, 906.

[72] I National Archives. Mureş. Unirea High School Fond, File. See also N. A. Constantinescu, *Albumul istoriei românilor*, (Bucureşti,:Cartea Românească, 1927).

[73] For instance in the history textbook for the 4th graders edited in 1986, on the cover, there is the portrait of Mihai Viteazul and within the pages, one can find reproductions after works of D. Stoica, Theodor Aman, and the Monument of the War Heroes from Mărăşeşti, *Istoria Patriei*, (Bucureşti: Didactica şi Pedagogică, 1986). See also the textbooks for students in the 8th, 9th grades. Similar images are in the textbooks edited after 1989: see *Istorie*. Clasa a VI-a, (Bucureşti: Editura Didactică şi Pedagogică, 2023). The chapter dedicated to the Nationalities includes reproductions after the paintings of C. D. Rosenthal and Th. Aman.

[74] For sure more consideration should be given to the analysis of how museums shape the national identity. However, the subject is too complex to be included in this paper. F. McLean, "Museums and the construction of national identity: A review". *International Journal of Heritage Studies*," 3(4): 244–252. https://doi.org/10.1080/13527259808722211

[75] Anthony D. Smith, *Art and national identity*, 11.

As for the media strategies for disseminating the national identity in relation to other nations, one should refer to the national and international exhibitions. We refer here both to the artistic events organized starting with the second half of the nineteenth century as well as to the works of art and architecture presented by Romanians at international and universal exhibitions. Laurenţiu Vlad examined these participations,[76] which we just mention here as they cannot be omitted by any scientific approach that aims to examine the artistic national imagery. The Romanian state understood that these events represented good opportunities for making the nation visible and finding support for the national cause. This was the case with the one from 1867 (note that Th. Aman was in the organizing committee) when the main purpose for the United Principalities' presence was a national one.[77]

Moreover, the architectural design of the pavilions renders a national perspective of presenting the state to others. For instance, in 1867 at the Universal Exhibition from Paris, the Romanian pavilion was a small-scale replica of the Church from Curtea de Argeş, and in 1889, at the next participation of the now independent Romanian state, the pavilions were realized by Ion Mincu, recalling elements of traditional, rustic Romanian architecture. It stands out that in relation to the others, Romanian authorities tried to expose what was specific (Photo 10, 11).

Conclusions

Therefore, as we tried to prove, in the Romanian case, the visual vocabulary was used as an accessible and powerful instrument for assuming and presenting its national features, both for its inhabitants and in relation to the foreigners. The Romanian authorities, the cultural elites and the artists understood the power of art as a propaganda tool from the moment they started to initiate a cultural, constructive and legal program meant to create Romanian modern society. Moreover, within the phases of the of nation-building process, and to reinforce the national sentiments and solidarity, when necessary, the formal educational system was turned into the most powerful medium of achieving this sense of national cohesion. Likewise, the comparative analysis of visual material from history textbooks edited during communist and post-communist regimes revealed a highly similar national imagery to the one articulated during the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th; it is the one that remained referential for the visual representations of the Romanian nation to this day.

In conclusion, the search for national identity in this period found a powerful expression in the art and architectural domains. In Romania, artists like Gh. Tattarescu, Theodor Aman, N. Grigorescu and architects such as Ion Mincu and the Neo-Romanian style, along with the contributions of contemporaries like Petre Antonescu and Nicolae Ghica-Budeşti, played a crucial role in the cultural movement, and they were aware of and publicly expressed the national value of artistic means. By drawing on historical past events and personalities, depicting the national landscape and peasants, and taking traditional motifs and integrating them with contemporary architectural practices, these artists and architects created a unique visual language that resonated with Romania's national aspirations, and their work continues to influence the country's cultural and architectural identity ever since.

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[76] Vlad, *Imagini ale identității naționale.*
[77] Vlad, *Imagini ale identității naționale*, 44.

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Photo 2. Theodor Aman, The Union, 1861[78]

Photo 3. Nicolae Grigorescu, The Union, 1866-1869 © Public Domain.

Photo 4. Ploieşti. The Hunter's Monument, 1897. The image is a postal card from the interwar period, thus also relevant for media of dissemination © https://imagoromaniae.ro/produs/ploiesti-monumentul-vanatorilor/

Photo 5. *Mihai Viteazul* Equestrian statue, Bucharest, Romania, 1874. Postal card before 1900[79] © Public Domain.

Photo 6. Curtea de Argeş inner courtyard as photographed by the artist Carol Pop de Szatmari, 1860s[80] © Public Domain.

Photo 7. Ion Mincu. The Central School for Girls © Mara Popescu and Georgeta Fodor

Photo 8. Ion Mincu. The Central School for Girls. Detail from the frontispiece with the name of important women personalities for Romanian's past © Mara Popescu and Georgeta Fodor

Photo 9. Ion Mincu. *Bufetul de la Şosea*

Photo 10. Theodor Aman's House

Photo 11. Cover of the Album by George Bibescu, on the occasion of the universal exhibition from Paris, 1889.[81]

Photo 12. Image published in the journal *Literatura şi arta română*. The agricultural section of the pavilion designed by Ion Mincu.

Photo 1.

Photo 2.

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[78] Unirea Principatelor - 1957 - Institutul Naţional Al Patrimoniului, Romania - Public Domain. https://www.europeana.eu/item/2048047/Athena_Plus_ProvidedCHO_Institutul_National_al_Patrimoniului_1A7FCD05B4F046B7A87F8558594DEAC8

[79] The image is available at the Library of Congrece: https://loc.gov/pictures/resource/ppmsc.06096/

[80] https://www.europeana.eu/ro/item/9200461/oai_digitool_bibnat_ro_743203

[81] 1889 : Exposition universelle de par prince Georges Bibescu - 1890 - Biblioteca Judeţeană "Octavian Goga" Cluj, Romania - CC BY-SA. https://www.europeana.eu/item/954/Culturalia_7cf28725_8b44_43bd_865d_096eb675480e

Photo 3 .

Photo 4.

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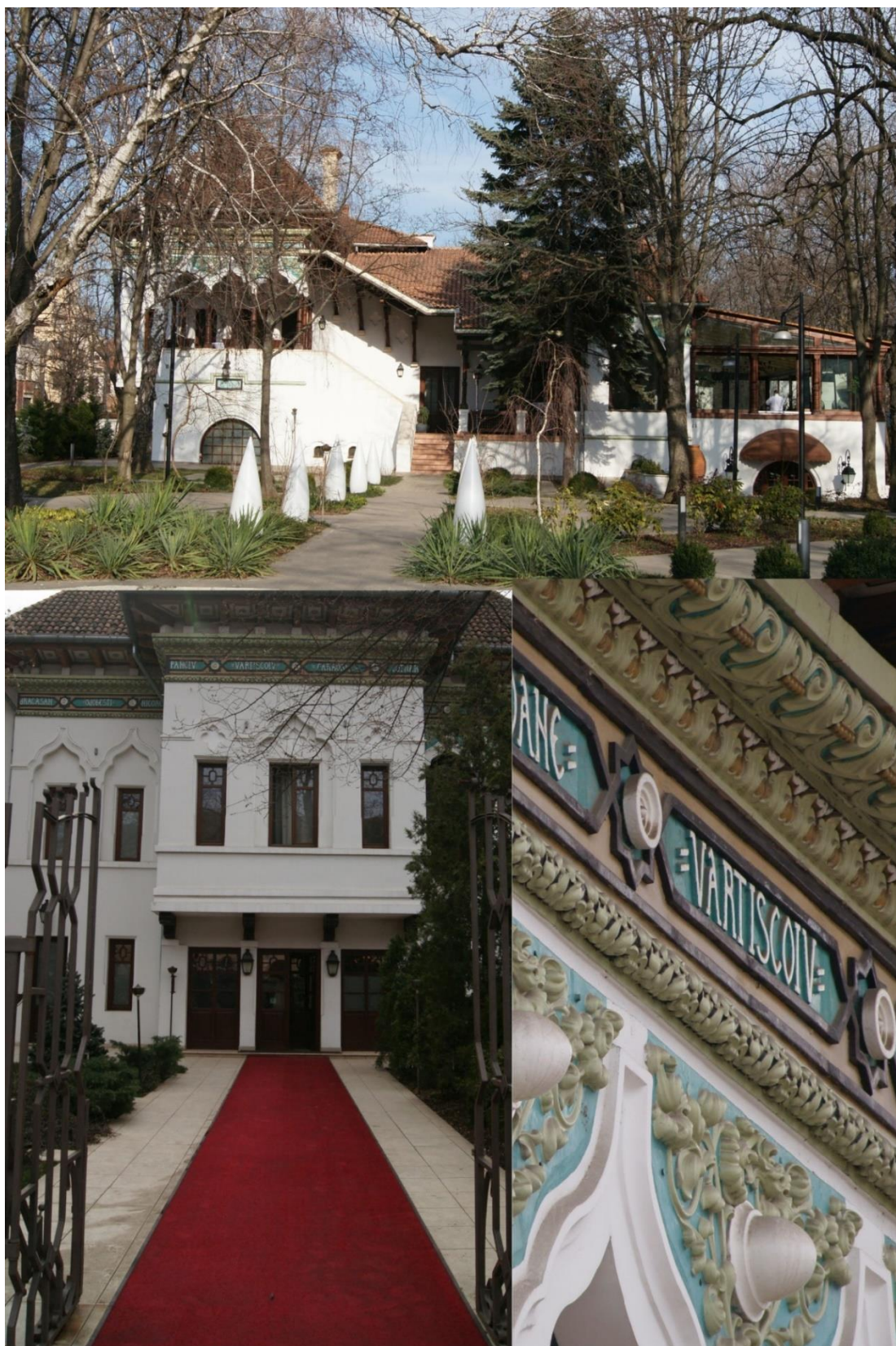
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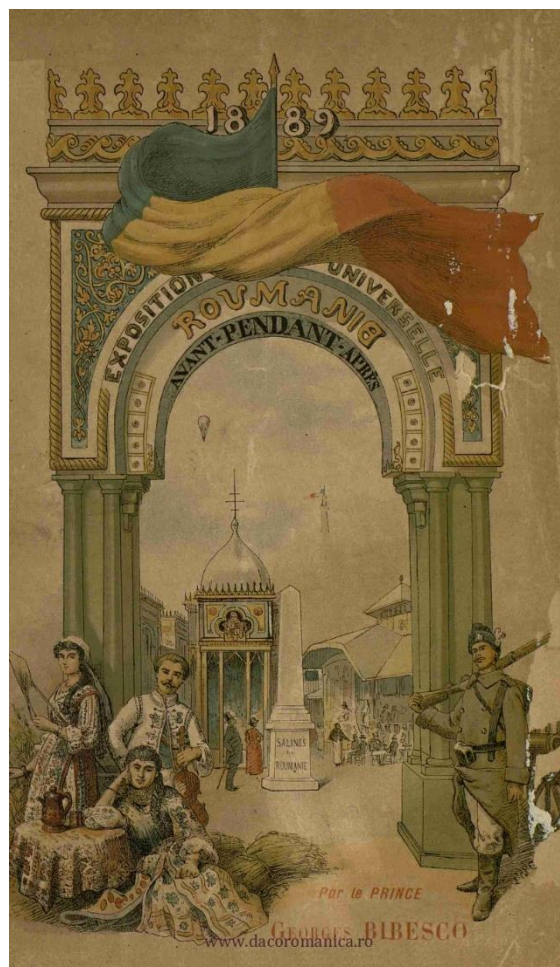
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Photo 12.

THE FABRICATION OF *OTHERNESS* IN ROMANIAN AND HUNGARIAN HISTORIOGRAPHIES DURING THE COMMUNIST ERA

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Rezumat: Articolul prezintă modul în care studiul istoriei a fost utilizat în România şi în Ungaria epocii comuniste în vederea construirii unor imagini reciproce polemice. Principalele surse utilizate au fost scrierile istoriografice ale perioadei respective.

Abstract: The article presents the way in which the study of history was used in communist Romania and Hungary in order to build polemical mutual images. The main sources used were the historiographical writings of that period.

Cuvinte-cheie: Istoriografie românească, istoriografie maghiară, comunism, cultură a memoriei, regimul Ceauşescu.

Keywords: Romanian historiography, Hungarian historiography, communism, culture of memory, Ceauşescu regime.

The shared Romanian-Hungarian past

At the beginning of the communist period, the two Marxist regimes from Romania and Hungary made tremendous efforts to rewrite their shared history with a view promoting the good understanding between Romanians and Hungarians. Past conflicts were not denied but were explained solely through the lens of class struggle theory. Throughout history, Romanians and Hungarians never actually fought one another, and the disputes in which they were engaged were always between the exploiting and the exploited classes, situated on different sides of the barricade. In the Middle Ages, the uprisings of Romanian and Hungarian peasants were targeted against the nobility. Later, when Romanians were deprived of their national rights, in the age of Dualism, this was due to the reactionary classes of Austria-Hungary. When Romanian troops conquered Budapest in 1919, they were driven into battle by the bourgeoisie and the great landowners in Romania. Not least, Horthy, Antonescu and the legionaries were fascists. Historians who presented things in this way were right to some extent. This view was not embraced only by the communists. Its roots went back to the Romantic age, when poets believed that nations were holy and predestined to live in harmony and perfect understanding. In the interwar period, Nicolae Iorga endorsed similar opinions, and the idea that ordinary people get on very well while conflicts are provoked solely by politicians who follow their selfish agendas is very widespread today. As it can be noticed, this benign contemporary perspective is marked by the communist legacy and, further back, by the romantic ideology.

On the other hand, communist historians and ideologues were wrong because of the rigid and exaggerated way in which they promoted the Marxist dogma about the indestructible solidarity of the exploited classes, not to mention the fact that scholars who refused to credit them were sacked or sent to prison. The truth is that, throughout history, it was possible for one Hungarian or the other to get really upset with a Romanian, even though they were class peers, as shown by the documents that bourgeois historians perused with shaky hands if they were still allowed to consult the archives. The past was far more nuanced than the utopias invented by Marx and Engels had let transpire.

In Romania, Victor Cheresteşiu, a long-standing Transylvanian communist militant and a champion of close relations between Romanians and Hungarians, who wrote some of the most celebrated Romanian-Hungarian dictionaries, published a pamphlet entitled *Români şi unguri* [*Romanians and Hungarians*] in 1947, in which he drew attention to the social oppression both nations suffered over the course of history. As N. D. Cocea, the author of the preface, wrote: "Hatred-spewing chauvinism has divided the two nations, Romanian and Hungarian, over the centuries. But

these nations do not hate one another. The reason for mutual misunderstanding and lack of knowledge, so detrimental to both nations, lies with the far-from-innocent manoeuvres of the reactionary, oppressing and exploiting cliques."[1]

One of the methods used to denounce the "bellicose, imperialist" nationalism was to compare the chauvinism promoted in either country. In contrast with the traditional view that our people are always right, Chereşteşiu stated that Romanians were no better than Hungarians, and the other way around. Atrocities against the other were committed by Hatvani, in 1849, and Urmánczy, in 1918, or by the "Maniu guards" in 1944. In Interwar Romania, the "indigenous element" was due to have "primacy" over foreigners, just like in the "Hungarian nation-state" the "state-supporting" element had a privileged position, which meant that Romanians were oppressed "under Hungarians," and Hungarians were oppressed "under Romanians."[2] But why should one be *under* the other, Chereşteşiu wondered, and why can't they live as equal nations? To overcome this sad legacy, it was imperative that the history which had been distorted by the two rival nationalisms should be rewritten in the spirit of truth. According to this truth, Romanians and Hungarians had never been enemies during the centuries in which they lived together: "Chauvinism still haunts Romanian and Hungarian intellectuals. Re-educating them is a difficult task and can't be rushed. What can be done is to prevent a falsified history from being taught in schools. This history talks about a millennial national struggle between Hungarians and Romanians, when in fact, in Transylvania, for centuries, the struggle has not been national but social, pitting on the one side, Romanian and Hungarian serfs, and on the other side, the privileged class."[3]

One year later (1948), Makkai László (the son of former Reformed Transylvanian Bishop Makkai Sándor) published a book on the relations between Hungarians and Romanians in Hungary. It was entitled *Magyar-román közös múlt* [*The Shared Hungarian-Romanian Past*] and was re-edited in 1989.[4] Unlike Chereşteşiu's work, this was not a propaganda pamphlet, but a well-documented work, written in an attractive style, and of the highest academic standard. The idea that Hungarians, more often than not, wrote very well-articulated studies on the topic, while Romanians replied with rather tenuous booklets, reinforced a stereotype embraced by Romanians, who declared their own lack of rigour by contrast with the Hungarians' well-researched arguments. This implied they were more serious scholars, even though their ideas were profoundly wrong. In any case, *The Shared Past* was the best work of synthesis that had been published on the topic, and it still is one of the most important such undertakings. It continued the line of Hungarian works published in the 1940s, which tried to highlight the historical interferences between the two nations, including the ideological argument of their living side by side in Central Europe. Although these historiographical works had a national Hungarian component, they started from the premise that if Hungarians wished to continue having close relations with their conationals across the frontiers, they also had to reach out, for instance, to Romanians living alongside them in Transylvania. As the historian Miskolczy Ambrus states, Makkai's work could have launched a new era in the relations between the two historiographies[5] because the author extended a very generous hand to his Romanian peers.

Makkai showed, in an erudite and professional manner, how close relations between Hungarians and Romanians had been throughout history. For example, in the Middle Ages, the two Romanian voivodeships withstood the Ottoman threat with aid from the kings of Hungary and the princes of Transylvania. He also discussed the way in which Hungarian institutions and political models influenced neighbouring nations across the Carpathians.[6] The idea that Romanians owed so much to their relations with Hungarians could offend Romanian national pride, echoing the older superiority complexes of Hungarians. Makkai was very much aware of this danger and openly

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[1] Victor Chereşteşiu, *Români şi unguri. Scurtă privire istorică asupra raporturilor româno-maghiare din Ardeal* (Bucureşti: Editura de Stat, 1947), 3.

[2] Chereşteşiu, *Români şi unguri,* 83-90.

[3] Chereşteşiu, *Români şi unguri,* 90-91.

[4] László Makkai, *Magyar-román közös múlt* (Budapest: Teleki Pál Tudományos Intézet, 1948); László Makkai, *Magyar-román közös múlt* (Budapest: Héttorony Könyvkiadó, 1989).

[5] Hegedűs, Nicoleta, „Trecutul comun revizitat: imaginea românilor în scrisul istoric maghiar din perioada 1920-1948" in *Raporturi şi imagini româno-maghiare,* ed. Sorin Mitu (Cluj: Argonaut–Mega, 2023), 190.

[6] Gheorghe Brătianu and László I. Makkai, *Tündérkert. Grădina zînelor. Az erdélyi fejedelmi kor magyar és román szemmel. Epoca principatului transilvan în viziunea maghiară şi română* (Budapest: Miskolczy Ambrus, ELTE BTK, 1994).

criticised Hungarian tendencies to pose as cultural tutors of their neighbouring nations. At the same time, he argued that the refusal of Romanian historians to admit the importance of those influences was the sign of a prejudice that was detrimental to historical knowledge and affected the good relations between the two nations. If we knew how much we owe to one another, and how our ancestors cooperated in the past, we could get along better. Extending this logic, Makkai drew attention to the serious errors made by Hungarians in the past, such as refusing to grant Romanians national rights in 1848 or during the Dualist period, but he also disapproved of the radical agenda of Romanian leaders.[7]

In short, what any reasonable reader could say is that this work is proof of a balanced and empathetic viewpoint, even where it deals with topics that have traditionally divided historians from the two camps. It is true that Makkai did not believe that Romanians were present in Transylvania upon the arrival of the Hungarians. His main argument was that they appeared later in documentary sources, confirming, therefore, what Hungarian medievalists and scholars from other historiographic schools had contended. But there were also plenty of topics on which his views were unlikely to meet the disapproval of Romanian historians.

But this was not meant to be. Despite its qualities, the book was not sufficiently Marxist for the 1950s, and its author was regarded as too nationalistic even in Budapest. Romanian comrades reacted most fiercely and condemned the book with proletarian anger, claiming that Makkai had written a conflicting history of the relations between Romanians and Hungarians, infested with germs of chauvinism. In 1948, Romanian communists did not trust "bourgeois" historians, who were severely persecuted at that time, and Mihail Roller, the official historian of the regime, could not read in Hungarian. As a result, the task of countering historiographic nationalism in the neighbouring country was given to a Hungarian propagandist, the journalist Robotos Imre, who wrote only in Hungarian in the party's newsletter *Romániai Magyar Szó*, and then in the pamphlet *Az igazi román-magyar közös múlt* [*The real shared Romanian-Hungarian past*].[8] This response was destined exclusively to the Hungarian readership in Romania, as a lesson meant to show very firmly what the party line was on this matter. It's very likely that no Romanian managed to read the dangerous Hungarian attack allegedly waged by Makkai's book, considering that Romanian intellectuals, famished and terrorised, had very different priorities in 1948. But to Dej's surprise,[9] comrade Vasile Luca, who furiously accused his Budapest peers of nationalism, blamed this book for "falsifying history" in front of Rákosi, who was visiting Bucharest. Their conversation was conducted in Hungarian and would sound very hilarious to readers today.[10]

So, the tradition of inflamed – as well as very rudimentary – reactions to the opinions of Hungarian historians (which continued, rather unexpectedly, the polemics of the "bourgeois" historians) started in the first year of proletarian power, when, in fact, the two historiographies should have cooperated most harmoniously. Why did this happen? Because Romanian comrades would have been the most uninspired politicians if they had not exploited the discursive opportunities that historical disputes provided, in order to justify their positions and attitudes towards Hungarians, towards the Soviets or any other partner of interparty dialogue. To put it quite inelegantly, it was a topic one could cackle on indefinitely.

It is true that some of the best works that highlighted good historical relations between Romanians and Hungarians were written during these years, from a cleanly Marxist perspective. Studies on personalities with a modest social background who illustrated this collaboration (Nicolae Bălcescu or Ecaterina Varga) occupied an important place. Other studies were dedicated to Hungarian working-class heroes in Romania, who had fought alongside their Romanian comrades for the Republic of Councils. Peasant uprisings became a favourite topic of Romanian historians because of their potential to shed light on class struggle, and on the cooperation between Romanian and Hungarian peasants who had fought, side-by-side, at Bobâlna (1437) or under the leadership of Gheorghe Doja (1514). Moreover, Hungarian peasants participated, together with Romanian serfs, in

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[7] Makkai, *Magyar-román közös múlt*, passim.

[8] Imre Robotos, *Az igazi román-magyar közös múlt* ([București]: Romániai Magyar Szó Kiadása, 1948).

[9] *Minorităţi etnoculturale. Mărturii documentare. Maghiarii din România (1956-1968)* ed. Lucian Nastasă (Cluj: Centrul de Resurse pentru Diversitate Culturală, 2003), 558.

[10] *Minorităţi etnoculturale. Mărturii documentare. Maghiarii din România (1945-1955)* ed. Lucian Nastasă (Cluj: Centrul de Resurse pentru Diversitate Culturală, 2002), 615.

Horea's uprising – a heroic battle against social oppression. The enemy was embodied by the Hungarian nobility, the Court in Vienna, and the Romanian intellectual elites, who had failed to stand in solidarity with the rebels. This was not far from the truth if we ignore the rather hilarious rhetoric of that age. Urban toponymy, the names of streets, squares, schools, and factories drew the masses closer to the figures of Bălcescu, Doja and Ecaterina Varga.

Historians in Hungary also approached these topics. People did make an effort, so to speak. Massive and carefully edited collections of documents referring to the national problem were published. One example was the volume edited by Kemény G. Gábor (Kemény, 1952-1999) which shows how terrible Romanians felt in Austria-Hungary. For Hungarians, Bălcescu became the brightest figure in the history of the Romanian people because he strove, together with Kossuth, to lead Transylvanian Romanians to freedom, that is, against the Imperial Court, with which they had become allies in 1848.

I. Tóth Zoltán was the most important historian specialising in Romanian topics in the 1950s. He was one of the few Hungarian scholars whose works were also accepted by Romanian researchers. One of his works – *rara avis!* – was translated into Romanian. It focused on the peasant uprisings in the Apuseni Mountains[11] and complied both with Marxist demands and with Romanian historiographic views, obsessed as they were with the endless struggles of Romanians in Transylvania against social and national oppression. His fundamental work on the beginnings of Romanian nationalism in Transylvania,[12] written from a perspective that was very favourable to Romanians, was not Marxist enough in terms of its topic and approach, so it had to wait for a Romanian translation until the year 2001.[13] Even after his tragic death during the Revolution of 1956, several important works on the topic of *Magyarok és románok*,[14] which he hadn't succeeded to publish, were edited in Hungary. A great Romanian-phile, he wrote the following in the late 1940s: "Hungarians and Romanians do not see eye to eye because they do not know each other. Even today the opinion of the Hungarian public is very keen on belittling the Romanian people, disrespecting their history, or claiming that it does not exist. It is certain, however, that, of late, interest and esteem for the Romanian nation has been on the rise. There are already many people who would like to know Romanian history and culture more closely, even if not knowing the language is clearly a hindrance […] My belief is that nothing will contribute to a better cohabitation between the Romanian and Hungarian nations than revealing the historical truth at the highest human level possible."[15]

One of his students (who later became the editor of his posthumous writings) was Csatári Dániel, another author with a passion for Romanian-Hungarian relations. In the 1950s he wrote works dealing with the "contribution of the Romanian people to the liberation of Hungary from Hitler's occupation" and addressed the problematic years 1940-1945 from a viewpoint that was very close to Romanian historiography, heavily condemning "Horthysm".[16] Notwithstanding this, it appears that his views were not close enough to those Romanian historians who guided themselves after the motto of their Latin ancestors: beware of Greeks – or Hungarians – even when they are bearing gifts! Consequently, Csatári failed to receive recognition from his Romanian colleagues, apart from a few quotations from his books in French, which served the purpose of punishing some alleged deviations from the orthodox line of Romanian interpretations.[17]

This last detail sheds light on the key issue (that others might see as inconsequential) of Romanian-Hungarian historiographic dialogue. Whereas the historians in Hungary who were interested in Romanian topics studied documents and bibliography in Romanian (since most of them had been born in Transylvania and studied in Romania), the majority of Romanian historians during the communist era read only those works published in French or German by their Hungarian

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[11] Zoltán I. Tóth, *Paraszt mozgalmak az erdélyi Érchegységben 1848-ig* (Budapest: Közoktatásügyi Kiadóvállalat, 1951); Zoltán I. Tóth, *Mișcările țărănești din Munții Apuseni până la 1848* (București: Editura Academiei, 1955).
[12] Zoltán I. Tóth, *Az erdélyi román nacionalizmus első százada. 1697-1792* (Budapest: Athenaeum, 1946).
[13] Zoltán I. Tóth, *Primul secol al naționalismului românesc ardelean. 1697-1792* (București: Pythagora, 2001).
[14] Zoltán I. Tóth, *Magyarok és románok. Történelmi tanulmányok* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1966).
[15] Zoltán Györke, „Maghiarii și românii: lecții din trecut. Și lecții de urmat", *Contributors* 14 March 2020. https://www.contributors.ro/maghiarii-și-romanii-lecții-din-trecut-și-de-urmat/.
[16] Dániel Csatári, "Román csapatok részvétele Magyarország felszabadításáért lefolyt harcokban. 1944. augusztus 23 — 1945. április 4". *Hadtörténeti Közlemények*, No. 1-2, (1958).
[17] Dániel Csatári, *Dans la tourmente. Les relations hungaro-roumaines de 1940 à 1945* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1974).

colleagues, not to mention the historical sources. Older-generation historians like David Prodan, Silviu Dragomir and Ştefan Meteş could speak Hungarian, but the younger scholars, particularly those who were educated outside Transylvania, rarely, if ever, learned Hungarian and not very well. After all, they didn't really need to. While historians in Hungary wrote histories of Hungarian-Romanian relations or of Romania as a country,[18] Romanian historians very seldom engaged with aspects of Hungarian history. When they did, they approached them solely in the context of the relations between Hungarians and Romanians in Transylvania (region which was nothing but a component of Romanian territory) or even Romania.

Then what was the point of learning Hungarian? The idea that Hungarian was an exotic language that Romanians could only learn with great difficulty quickly became a stereotype. Polish, or neo-Greek, wasn't easier, but Romanians who studied Poland or the Phanariot reigns did learn these languages (which didn't have the ill reputation of unintelligibility) with greater or lesser difficulty. To give just one counterexample, American historians who came to study Transylvania, from Keith Hitchins to Holly Case, diligently studied Romanian, Hungarian and German, without complaining too much about the hardships of genuine scholarly effort.

In any case, this led many Romanian authors to write about different aspects of Romanian-Hungarian relations using only bibliography published in languages of international circulation. They took advantage of the fact that Hungarian historians had published quite substantially in foreign languages, including in the communist period. Of greater concern were their heavy polemics with Hungarian scholars, whose works they had not read in their original form. Not that this was such a big problem: everyone knew what the Hungarians were thinking, and they only wrote because they wanted Transylvania! And the truth is that even the findings of Romanian historians who could read Hungarian weren't so different from those of the non-Hungarian speaking researchers. This was a further reason why those who embarked on studying the history of Romanian Transylvania didn't even bother to learn the languages of the ethnic minorities living in the region.

Hungarian historians had been interested in understanding the premises of Romanian nationalism since the nineteenth century, when Jancsó Benedek wondered: what do Romanians have against us and how come they consider us savages?[19] It is not surprising that Marxist historians took over the topic and analysed it in detail. They showed that Romanians had plenty of reasons to be disgruntled with the national politics of the dominant Hungarian classes. At the deepest level, this was an explanation of the present circumstances that provided a better understanding for the dramas in Hungary's recent history. Studying the historical movements and tendencies of Romanians can show why Transylvania belongs to Romania today. This is a country with which we must have cordial relations since we are still interested in the fate of our conationals there. As the above-quoted words suggest, historians in communist Hungary made serious efforts to adjust Hungarian historical consciousness to contemporary reality and, to some extent, to improve imagological relations with Romanians.

It's time we made a little history

On the other side of the ethnic barricade, things were quite different. The research of Hungarian scholars had very little impact among Romanian historians. Despite a few awkward attempts in the 1950s that approached Romanian-Hungarian relations from a more conciliatory viewpoint (which would be partially criticised over the following decades), Romanian historians continued to be concerned with defending their own perspective, and not to understand the Hungarian one. What is there to understand if they're always in the wrong? Their error may be a sign of ill will! This mentality of a fortress that is continually under siege by Hungarian heresy, denial and untruth survived and was reinforced in Romanian historiography, especially during Ceauşescu´s regime.

The party's relinquishment of the internationalist line was amply reflected in the study of history. The leadership of the PMR (Romanian Workers´ Party) – which excluded vulnerable

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[18] Zoltán I. Tóth, *Románia története (1864-1948)* (Budapest: Felsőoktatási Jegyzetellátó Vállalat, 1957); Zsolt Trócsányi and Ambrus Miskolczy, *A Fanariótáktól a Hohenzollernekig. Társadalmi hanyatlás és nemzeti emelkedés a román történelemben (1711-1866). Két tanulmány* (Budapest: ELTE BTK, 1992).

[19] Benedek Jancsó, *A román nemzetiségi törekvések története és jelenlegi állapota* (Budapest: Lampel Róbert, 1896-1899), I, 152.

historians of the old regime, who lost their lives in Sighet Prison in the 1950s – felt the need to take a stand against the nationalist derailments they detected in Hungary.

The solution they came up with, echoing the formula advanced by Dej, was to incite Romanian nationalism against Hungarians (a nationalism that was kept on a long leash controlled by the party, nonetheless). This also meant releasing from prison some specialists on the history of Transylvania, as was Silviu Dragomir.[20] In 1965, his monographic study of Avram Iancu was published posthumously. Not only did he resume a very delicate historical topic, but he approached it almost like in the past. Dragomir claimed that in his historical duel with Kossuth, the Romanian hero of 1848 may have made a few minor ideological mistakes, but they were well-nigh undetectable. Yet the judgment of history – in its Romanian court – proved beyond doubt that Romania had almost always been right about all important matters, while Hungarians, including their most illustrious historical figures, had done unforgivable mistakes.

Romanian historiography returned to its traditional purpose: showing how just the Romanian perspective had been throughout history in the polemical dialogue with Hungarian historians, most of the time. One year before the publication of Dragomir's book, Kossuth Avenue in Cluj was rebaptised Lenin.[21] In the minds of the Romanian communist leaders, this was a very agile solution (quite hypocritical, in fact) because no one could be officially accused of Romanian nationalism for such a change. Everyone knew the reason behind it: a Hungarian hero was no longer desired in the streets of Romanian Transylvania.

In Hungary, the Hungarian communist leaders were outraged when they learned about the nationalist abuses in Romania. After a while, as always in the conflict between the two parties, it was difficult to tell who had started it, and who was to blame: Rákosi's claims on Transylvania, the nationalist quips in Hungarian almanacs, or the dismantling of the Hungarian university in Cluj? The truth is that neither camp could abstain from this because the eagerness of historians to write about what they thought was true and vital derived from a century-old cultural tradition. Communism couldn't erase it, but rather tried to put it to some good use.

In 1959, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej reiterated his discontent with the social-political preoccupations of his Hungarian peers: "It is not by chance that during the counterrevolution, an organisation of beheaders appeared in the streets of Budapest. Carrying human heads that hanged from the tips of their bayonets, they kept shouting that they wanted Transylvania. I am sure they will eventually calm down because they don't have any kind of argument, and no one can meet their demands. Instead of minding their business and building socialism, shoulder to shoulder, they cause trouble with others, they do such things […] What if we started referring to the Tibet and inquiring about it, when it is clear that it belongs to China."[22]

Despite his usual, reconciliatory tone and the hope that things would gradually turn back to normal, Dej (who thought that Hungarian interest in Transylvania was comparable to a hypothetical claim on Tibet) concluded that we couldn't sit by and had to counterattack: "It's time we made a little history. There is this manuscript by Marx, where he refers to the peasant wars. In principle, he refers to Transylvania, expresses his views on Transylvania, calls Kossuth a traitor, says that he betrayed his Slovaks and serves the Hungarians. He shows how Romanians, Czechs, and Slovaks are oppressed; he shows that two-thirds of Transylvania's population is Romanian. Marx even began to learn the Romanian language. In a place there were some Romanian words, instead of *țară* he wrote *tzară*."[23]

Marx, who was romanianised and lured to our side in typical Romanian protochronist fashion, was the supreme argument one could use to deal a heavy blow to the nationalist Hungarians. But those who had to write down this task trusted by the party were the communist historians who laboured in the field of Romanian research. And how could they refuse to complete this task? They could hardly wait to do it! And also, to tell the truth about Transylvania, again!

Two volumes entitled *Din istoria Transilvaniei* [*On the History of Transylvania*] were published not long afterwards, in 1960 and 1961. This was the first attempt to approach this topic from a perspective that was simultaneously historical-materialist and national-Romanian. This was the

[20] Stefano Bottoni, *Transilvania roșie. Comunismul român și problema națională. 1944-1965* (Cluj: Editura Institutului pentru Studierea Problemelor Minorităților Naționale–Kriterion, 2010), 295.

[21] Sorin Mitu, "Rumänische Erinnerungsorte in Klausenburg", *Zeitschrift für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde* 43 (2020): 35.

[22] Nastasă, *Minorități etnoculturale (1956-1968)*, 560.

[23] Nastasă, *Minorități etnoculturale (1956-1968)*, 560.

golden formula that would dominate the following decades. Besides Victor Cherestești, who had given up much of his internationalist rhetoric, the other authors were Constantin Daicoviciu, Ştefan Pascu and Cornelia Bodea. The rigid Marxist tenets of the 1950s were still visible. Episodes in which Romanian and Hungarian peasants cooperated in their common struggle against social oppression were ubiquitous and very annoying because of how relentlessly they were foregrounded.

But something had changed almost imperceptibly. For instance, in 1848 and 1918, Romanians' stance was just and progressive, on account that those events had been the work of the masses, which were infallible, in Marxist terms. Even bourgeois leaders like Bărnuțiu (who "mistook the Hungarian ruling class for the Hungarian people… and created enmity and distrust between the two nations") had committed numerous ideological mistakes, and the general course of history showed that Romanians have been right in Transylvania.[24] Leaving aside the fraternity of Romanian and Hungarian exploited classes, the most important thing was that the authors of those studies approached Transylvania as a component of the Romanian territorial conglomerate – a reality not just of the present but of history in its entirety: "Transylvania lies of the core of a unitary territory, not just in terms of its genesis and evolution, but also through its complex economy, and this is a territory inhabited by the Romanian people."[25]

For the Hungarian communist historians who interpreted Marxism and the just solving of the national matter by examining the map of the Carpathian Basin or the medieval history of the Kingdom of Hungary through a different lens, this was too much. In 1961, having just published an anthology of Romanian poetry in Hungarian, Köpeczi Béla, a historian who served as a cultural dignitary in communist Hungary and translated the work of Bălcescu in Hungarian, voiced his discontent with the volume that appeared in Bucharest, in front of a Romanian diplomat accredited in Budapest: "The publication of the volume *On the History of Transylvania* has produced much "noise" in historians' circles in the Hungarian People's Republic […] Almost everyone who has read it believes it has a negative influence on Romanian-Hungarian relations […] it is a manifestation of Romanian nationalism."[26] Köpeczi was convinced that the work had been approved for publication by the Romanian party and state leadership, which created a delicate and upsetting situation in Hungary: Why do Romanian historians have permission to publish such works, while Hungarian historians are prohibited from publishing research that might irritate their "neighbours".[27]

As these exchanges show, Romanian-Hungarian rivalry – visible even in a sketchily phrased question "who is allowed to speak ill of the other more?" – continued to work even during the communist period. Köpeczi and his colleagues would have to stay put for twenty-five more years, until 1986, when they finally took revenge on the topic of Transylvania's history.

The truth is that the expectations of Hungarian historians regarding their Romanian colleagues' tempered attitudes were far too great. They were vexed even by what was essentially an anti-nationalist work like *On the History of Transylvania*. Hungarians and Romanians literally lay in wait for each other, eager to sanction any deviation that was deemed unacceptable. In 1957, Demény Lajos, a Hungarian historian from Romania, thought that even comrade Mihail Roller (regarded by his Romanian peers as the mouthpiece of proletarian internationalism) had a "rather nationalist stance […] on issues of Hungarian-Romanian history".[28] That Roller should have been seen as a nationalist is downright hilarious! But the young Szekler historian, who settled in Bucharest and became a DAHR senator later in life, who had studied in the USSR and published scholarly studies on old Romanian books, honestly believed that Romanians and Hungarians had to be friends and that nationalism was a bad thing. Consequently, he was highly suspicious of any deviation from these principles.

Historians in Hungary failed to understand how important nationalist positions were for Romanian scholars, despite being communists. In the opinion of Hungarians, on the path of brotherhood and in the light of their effort to write about the peasant uprisings in the Apuseni Mountains and Nicolae Bălcescu, it would be much appreciated if their Romanian comrades set aside more delicate topics that hurt Romanian-Hungarian relations and focused on moments of

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[24] Constantin Daicoviciu, Ştefan Pascu, et al., *Din istoria Transilvaniei*. Vol. I-II (București: Editura Academiei, 1960-1961).
[25] Daicoviciu et al., *Din istoria Transilvaniei*, I, 17.
[26] Nastasă, *Minorități etnoculturale (1956-1968)*, 672.
[27] Nastasă, *Minorități etnoculturale (1956-1968)*, 672.
[28] Nastasă, *Minorități etnoculturale (1956-1968)*, 294.

understanding and good cooperation. As Köpeczi argued: "In the Romanian People's Republic, energy and funding are futilely spent to elucidate clarified issues. The new relations between the Romanian People's Republic and the Hungarian People's Republic consecrate a reality: they recognise that it is right for Transylvania to belong to the Romanian People's Republic, it is known that most of the population in this province is Romanian. It is no longer necessary for Romanian historians and archaeologists to "waste" their time looking for evidence about the birth of the Romanian people and about the continuity of the Daco-Roman population on the territory of Dacia."[29]

Romanian historians, on the other hand, wished to leave aside aspects they thought were irrelevant and to lay emphasis on the great battles fought by Romanians in history: Horea's uprising, the Revolution of 1848, the struggle against Austro-Hungarian dualism, Transylvania's union with Romania, not surprisingly, the very moments in which Romanians and Hungarians, regardless of their class, had situated themselves in opposing camps. Concerning the problem of Daco-Roman continuity and the forming of the Romanian people, it was clear that scholars in Romania would continue to "waste" their time digging for the keystone of Romanian historical identity. As I. Toth had noticed in the interwar period,[30] Romanian historians could not let go of that issue. The fact that they were communists now hadn't changed a thing in this regard.

In time, theoretical and methodological differences appeared in terms of the object of study in history. This led to a widening of the gap between Romanian and Hungarian historians. The former preferred event-history, with its focus on the countless political and military conflicts of the past. The latter, with a stronger Marxist agenda, were more interested in the economic, social, and cultural aspects, but also in everyday life and mentalities. These research areas shed light on the way the two nations lived together and influenced one another in positive ways. That is why the few Romanian historians who also engaged with such topics, in the spirit of the Annales School, were much less critical of their Hungarian peers.

Historians and secret police officers, at war with *Erdélyi története*

The Ceaușescu period (1965-1989) was the golden age of historiographic disputes between Romanians and Hungarians. The term "war" – a war waged on paper – can be used here without restraint. Much of what Romanian historians wrote acquired official status. The "historiographic front," as this field of "intellectual labour" was called, aimed at combating historians from Hungary whose scientific works were perceived as threats to Transylvania. The publication of books on contentious topics and the participation of Romanian historians in international conferences where they attempted to refute Hungarian "inimical theses" were of interest not just to party propaganda, but also to the *Securitate* [Romanian secret police] organs.

As the communist regime became more unpopular, many Romanian historians tried to limit their collaboration with it, and do their job ethically, avoiding official indications as far as possible. However, the ground on which disputes referring to Transylvania were carried was very slippery. Many Romanian scholars believed that, when they were engaging in controversy with Hungarian historians, they were not supporting the Ceaușescu regime, but defending the "historical truth" and the "national interests" which, in their view, overlaped. Even the *Securitate* officers, some of whom had realised that the regime was in deadlock, looked for moral justification and alibis for their zealous participation in activities designed to undermine Hungarian historical propaganda. Hundreds of historical studies were published and an even greater number of informative notes were stored in the *Securitate* files. They consolidated this key theme of Romanian perception of Hungarians, which reached a climax in the communist period. According to this notion, Hungarians were a nation whose historians denigrated Romanians and distorted Romanian history in the hope of challenging the Romanian claim over Transylvania. This was an image which didn't resonate with the conviction shared by Hungarian scholars that they were doing solid scientific research.

The most illustrative episode of this polemic took place in 1986, when a group of Hungarian historians led by Köpeczi Béla, who was Minister of Culture in the government of the Hungarian People's Republic at that time, published a work entitled *Erdélyi története három kötetben* [*The*

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[29] Nastasă, *Minorități etnoculturale (1956-1968)*, 672.
[30] Zoltán I. Tóth, "Az erdélyi román nacionalizmus kialakulása", in *Magyarok és románok*, eds. József Deér, László Gáldi (Budapest: Athenaeum, 1944), II, 74-78.

History of Transylvania in Three Volumes].[31] This book was a success and was republished several times, including in an abbreviated edition, followed by translations into English, French and German. Its authors (including Makkai László, Trócsányi Zsolt, Miskolczy Ambrus, and Szász Zoltán) were the most outstanding historians in Hungary and had deep knowledge on the history of Transylvania and of Romanian history in general. Some of them had written many studies about it throughout their lives. The impressive bibliography of each chapter comprised the most important works of Hungarian, Romanian, and Saxon historiography, that the scholars had studied in original form, discussing and analysing them critically. Even though they amended them if they deemed it necessary, the authors of this collection of studies consistently tried to present the viewpoints of each historiography, all the more so if sensitive issues, which could generate diverse interpretations, were at stake.

For Romanian historians, the most unpleasant challenge posed by this work – which is also, to this day, the most difficult to accept – was its scientific standard. The authors of these three large volumes were very well acquainted with the historical sources, the bibliography, and research methodology. Even though one did not approve of some interpretations or conclusions of the Hungarian colleagues, one could not ignore this essential aspect. But the Romanian historians did. During the Ceaușescu regime, every Romanian author who reviewed or simply referenced the book, vehemently condemned it as an unscientific work, full of errors, dangerous and without merit. The effect of this verdict was still felt in the subsequent decades, when most Romanian researchers expressed their disagreement with its premises, as if this were a shameful or cursed book.

Many important Romanian historians had good personal relations with their Hungarian counterparts. They met at international symposia and, after 1989, at sessions of the joint committee of Romanian-Hungarian history, a debate venue of the two academies. And yet, this representative work was never discussed openly. It was an *aporia* that logic couldn't provide an answer to. In fact, things were much simpler: they were Hungarians, so they couldn't be reasoned with, at least on some topics. The reverse also made sense. Hungarian historians had no interlocutor to reason with on this issue.

The stigmatisation of this seminal study written by Hungarian scholars was one of the most unreasonable reactions in Romanian historiography. If we read the book, we can realise that it was far from evil, which begs the question whether Romanian historians who criticised it so assiduously had read it at all. In the late 1980s, there was a typed translation in Romanian of the infamous work at the History Institute in Cluj, strictly for internal confidential use. It had been completed in a great rush at the request of the party organs and was meant to be read only by the historians who had been summoned to refute it. The quality of the improvised polemical effort behind this translation was illustrated by the fact that the name of the Visigoths, for instance, was translated into Romanian as "water Goths." The translator had indeed heard about the Goths but thought that this was the best equivalent for the Hungarian term *vizigót*, considering that *víz* meant "water" in Romanian and *gót* was easy to infer.

Leaving these anecdotal details aside, one can notice, for the first time in such a massive scientific volume, that Transylvania was no longer treated as a part of Hungary, as the Hungarians had insisted ever since they came here and baptised the place. In the eyes of Hungarian historians, Transylvania was a province whose identity was granted by the cohabitation of three nations: Romanians, Hungarians, and Saxons. Consequently, its history, in which the Hungarian element was deeply entrenched, was no longer seen to legitimise the fact that this territory belonged to Hungary, but to outline the idea that Hungarians were, much like Saxons and Romanians, one of the components of its historical identity. The political implications that could be inferred from this (if we insist on it, since the authors of the volume refrained from any comment of this kind) were that, in view of the history they shared, the three cohabiting nations in Transylvania should each find a place in its symbolic and constitutional architecture, because they were the political communities that had founded this province.

In other words, in the historical dialogue on Transylvania in which Hungarians had previously claimed that this province belonged to Hungary and Romanians had shown that it was Romanian land, the view imparted by the authors of this volume was clearly positioned in the middle, as a sort of compromise. It's not just ours, it's not just yours, it is a historical condominium that we must manage together, in full awareness that we share a past in this place.

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[31] *Erdély története három kötetben*. Vol. I-III. ed. Béla Köpeczi (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1986).

But if one would be suspicious of the intentions of the above-mentioned historians (in keeping with a good Romanian tradition), one could suspect their thesis of being an artifice meant to save whatever was left of their symbolical claims on Transylvania, now that all hope to regain this territory had been lost. However we look at things, it would be difficult to argue that the history of Transylvania is anything but the story of entwined relations between the ethno-cultural communities that have lived here. Transylvania is, in the most objective and profound way, the territory of several such communities, just like so many other similar territories in Europe – such as Alsace, Switzerland, Savoy, Silesia, the Catholic Netherlands and Northern Ireland, whose history equally includes Germans and Frenchmen, Germans, Frenchmen and Italians, Frenchmen and Italians, Poles and Germans, Walloons and Flemings, Protestant and Catholic Irishmen, respectively – regardless of the different political solutions reached in each and every one of them.

Romanian historians refrained from sophisticated interpretations of these matters. They saw the work of their Hungarian colleagues simply as a reprehensible attempt to deny the historical claims of Romanians concerning Transylvania and ultimately to question the legitimacy of contemporary frontiers.[32] Transylvania could by no means be a "space of complementarity." Transylvania did not belong to Romanians *and* Hungarians (*and* Saxons). It belonged solely to Romanians. It was "Romanian land," always and forever. We may accept Hungarians to live beside us, and we may agree that we have often got along quite well, that we have cooperated sometimes and that ordinary individuals have had peaceful relations, but despite all this, they remain a minority population. They were migrators in the beginning, foreigners to us and to this land that is ours alone. As the poet Adrian Păunescu wrote: "this is our country, we don't live on rent".[33] But Hungarians do – the logic goes – live like tenants in a Romanian house. The Romanian public did not realise how unfair this conception was, from a historical viewpoint, for the Szeklers, Hungarians and Saxons of Transylvania. They too lived for over a millennium in the mountains, towns, and fortified villages here, and also thought that this land belonged to them and their forefathers since the beginning of time, and they rarely met Romanians in the regions in which they lived as compact communities.

On the other hand, we must bear in mind that the polemical reaction brought forward by Romanian historians was commissioned by the party. Ceauşescu condemned the Hungarian book in a speech, and the party documents regarded it as "an open attack against Romania's territorial integrity, which officially supports the political dismemberment of the contemporary Romanian state".[34] However exaggerated, the opinion according to which the erudite studies of Hungarian historians imperilled Romania's frontiers became a keystone of Romanian political and cultural imaginary. It shed light on the obsessive fear that Transylvania was permanently threatened by Hungarians, both from within and from without, so any such event had to be dealt with very vigilantly. Why did Romania lose Northern Transylvania in 1940? A key strategy in this fierce battle was the propaganda abroad. Consequently, the Romanian state purchased advertisement space in the Western press, where it published outraged comments on Hungarian historiography.[35] The volume of studies *Jocul periculos al falsificării istoriei* [*The dangerous game of falsifying history*], which teemed with similarly uncouth diatribes, was translated into English.[36] Party activists, historians, and the *Securitate* cooperated very closely in the fight against Hungarian irredentism and revisionism, as long as the main weapons of this enemy were history books published in Hungary, or pamphlets about Ceauşescu's aberrant policies printed by the Hungarian diaspora.

Many Romanian historians summoned to join this imagological war were delighted with this role. Mediocre scholars, such as the well-known official historians of the regime, Mircea Muşat and Ion Ardeleanu, could hope to stand out by writing propagandistic works, although they had no scientific value. Even professional historians, such as Ştefan Pascu and Ştefan Ştefănescu, answered the party's call with enthusiastic docility, to obtain symbolic benefits, to be acknowledged as leaders of the Romanian historiographic battlefront, and to confirm their own conviction that they were

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[32] Felician Velimirovici, „O controversă istoriografică româno-maghiară în ultimii ani ai regimului comunist (1986-1989)". *Banatica*, II (2020): 520.

[33] Adrian Păunescu, *Cartea cărţilor de poezie* (Bucureşti: Editura Păunescu, 2003), 511.

[34] Velimirovici, „O controversă istoriografică…", 520.

[35] Velimirovici, „O controversă istoriografică…", 520.

[36] *The Dangerous game of falsifying history. Studies and articles,* eds. Ştefan Pascu and Ştefan Ştefănescu (Bucureşti: Editura Ştiinţifică şi Enciclopedică, 1987).

performing acts of patriotism. An older-generation Transylvanian historian like Ştefan Pascu could remember the persecutions he had suffered at the beginning of his career, when he learned the bitter lesson of obedience to the party, and the dramatic loss of Transylvania in his youth. He also liked to add his signature on hundreds of history books that were published during those years (at least as the author of their forewords).

The fear of the Hungarian threat had therefore become an efficient tool for luring Romanian intellectuals to the side of the communist regime. The secret police played an important role in this process. It demanded reports from those historians who were allowed to make professional visits abroad, instructing them how to spy on their Hungarian peers, and commissioning historical studies meant to dismantle hostile Hungarian theses. Important representatives of Romanian historiography were recruited as collaborators of the secret services.[37] The fact that their purported mission was to defend the Transylvanian cause, rather than to consolidate the Ceauşescu regime, offered a moral excuse to those who refused to see themselves as simple informants of the secret police.

To carry out their duties, the *Securitate* officers exploited their collaborators' human weaknesses, ranging from fear and professional ambition to the desire to obtain a travel visa. In this context, anti-Hungarian sentiment and the disquietude of Romanian nationalism were used as "specific means" to pervert people's conscience. Historical culture was bizarrely entwined with repressive activity, because both aimed to achieve the same goal: to counter the Hungarian threat. In its efforts to defend the communist regime, which included the fight against the Hungarian peril, the *Securitate* used the whole arsenal of weapons available to it, from the mere data collection and "positive persuasion" to threats, violence, and assassinations. In September 1989, for instance, Újvárossy Ernő, one of the close collaborators of the dissident minister Tőkés László, was found dead in a forest on the outskirts of Timişoara.

Conclusions

We could learn how far the anti-Hungarianism went, as it was promoted at the end of the Ceauşescu regime, with its original blend of police repression and references to Romanian historical imaginary, from a threat letter sent to historian Mihnea Berindei in 1989. Berindei was an anti-communist thinker who lived in Paris, and had signed the *Budapest Declaration*. He was under Romanian secret police surveillance because, instead of fighting against the Hungarian threat, he had made a pact with the enemy and militated against the Bucharest regime, together with the democratic opposition in Hungary. The historian appeared to have betrayed the national ideals even in his family life, because his wife had Hungarian roots! The heading of this letter, which ended up in a batch of documents declassified by the FBI, contained an overturned hatchet, with the blade facing downwards and with the handle featuring the Dacian wolf, next to a curved Dacian dagger. These insignia were accompanied by the motto "the sword alone can decide," believed to have been uttered by Avram Iancu, the Romanian hero from 1848. This was in fact a serious distortion, because Iancu had written the very opposite: "weapons can never decide" between Romanians and Hungarians[38]. The message was signed "The sons of Avram Iancu. A radical patriotic organisation of the Romanian exile." This was a made-up entity created by the *Securitate*, dissimulated among the members of the Romanian diaspora who had legionary sentiments. The text went as follows: "Mr. Berindei, we are very sorry for you, but it appears you won't understand reason. You have sold yourself to the Hungarians. You have sold your soul. You have poisoned your blessed Romanian seed, which you're hardly entitled to carry, by mixing it with Hungarian blood. You have shamelessly baptised your bastard with a name that is dear to us, Romanians, Vlad. Do you love him? Then MAKE UP YOUR MIND! Or start watching over him, moment by moment, inside the house, or during his walks, or give up the recreant work through which you have put yourself in the service of Hungarian revisionism, which attacks our dear Transylvania – as the most despicable traitor of the Romanian nation! You like to say that you didn't leave Romania to remain Romanian! Go on, then, be a Frenchman, a Turk, a Hungarian, or a gypsy, be whatever you want, but stop what you're doing while you can! If not, for the sake of your own life, dear Mihaly, then for that of your beloved Katalin and the mongrel you are cradling."[39]

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[37] Mădălin Hodor, „Lista celor 200. Elitele colaboraţioniste cu Securitatea", *Revista 22*. 17 April, 2018.
[38] Liviu Maior, *Avram Iancu. Scrisori* (Cluj: Dacia, 1972), 99.
[39] https://newsromania.net/anchete/dosarele-fbi-asasinarea-profesorului-ioan-petru-culianu/.

Ethnic slurs, revisionism, legionarism, the Dacian wolf and dagger, our dear Transylvania, Avram Iancu, mongrel infants cradled by Hungarian mothers, betrayal: it was the perfect cocktail of Romanian perception of Hungarians, and a significant component of Romanian historical imaginary. A poisoned potion prepared by the *Securitate* and the historiography serving the Ceaușescu regime, using cultural resources and historical anxieties risen from the dark entrails of Romanian nationalism.

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**THE MEMORY OF CULTURE IN ANA BLANDIANA`S AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL
WRITING: *MAI-MULT-CA-TRECUTUL, JURNAL 31 AUGUST 1988 – 12 DECEMBRIE 1989***

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Rezumat: Lucrarea de față își propune să facă o incursiune în scrierea autobiografică a Anei Blandiana *Mai-Mult-Ca-Trecutul, Jurnal 31 august 1988 - 12 decembrie 1989*, din punctul de vedere al memoriei culturii, așa cum apare aceasta în figurile de stil, mai ales în metafore. Prima parte a lucrării prezintă aspectele teoretice ale memoriei culturii/memoriei culturale, în general. A doua parte este un studiu de caz al procesului de formare a memoriei unei victime. Se încearcă prezentarea dinamicii unei memorii individuale (adică cea a Anei Blandiana așa cum apare în jurnalul ei) în umbra unui trecut recent, traumatizant, arătând modul în care a luat naștere memoria unui poet precum și modul în care aceasta a evoluat în timp. Partea a treia pune accentul pe analiza unor metafore aflate în legătură cu memoria culturii. Cea de-a patra parte a lucrării prezintă concluziile, făcând referire la ideile principale.

Abstract: The present paper aims at giving a brief insight into Ana Blandiana's autobiographical writing *The Past-Perfect-Tense, Diary 31st of August 1988 - 12nd of December 1989* (*Mai-Mult-Ca-Trecutul, Jurnal 31 august 1988 - 12 decembrie 1989*), from the point of view of the memory of culture topic, as it is revealed by the figures of speech, mainly by metaphors. The first part of the paper lays down the theoretical aspects of the memory of culture/cultural memory in general, the second part is a case study of a victim`s memory formation process. It attempts at presenting the dynamics of an individual memory (i.e. Ana Blandiana`s memory as it is revealed by her diary) in the shadow of a traumatic recent past, depicting the way in which a poet`s memory emerged and evolved throughout time. The third part focuses on the analysis of some metaphors in connection with the memory of culture. The fourth part of the paper gathers the conclusions, bringing together the main ideas.

Cuvinte-cheie: memoria culturii, memorie culturală, narațiune culturală, memorie individuală, memorie colectivă, rezistență prin cultură.

Keywords: the memory of culture, cultural memory, cultural narrative, individual memory, collective memory, resistance through culture.

Theoretical aspects of the memory of culture/ cultural memory

Along the history of humanity, memory has had its rises and falls. The fascination of memory has endured in spite of that fact that, in turns, memory has been overvalued or devalued. One can even say that there is an art of memory, a culture of remembrance or a memory of culture/ cultural memory as it has scholastically been referred to, based on a deliberate policy of remembering. The culture of memory cannot disappear despite recurring memory crises.

Initially, the theory of cultural memory developed in Germany when the country re-unified, in an attempt to redefine itself, resorting to collective remembrance. Academic theories of cultural memory developed about the same time, that is around 1990-2005, as an attempt to preserve the memory of the past, providing a sound theoretical foundation. Therefore, cultural memory or "*kulturwissenschaftliche Gedachtnistheorien*"[1] have been well-established in the Anglo-Saxon World.

Cultural memory or the memory of culture, pointing to the relationship between culture and memory, has continuously been debated, involving various fields of study and trying to establish theoretical and methodological standards. Its first mentioning occurred in Maurice Halbwachs`s

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[1] Nicolas Pethes, *Cultural Memory Studies. An Introduction* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019), viii.

studies on *mémoire collective*. Maurice Halbwachs was a French sociologist and developed the theory of „collective memory" between 1920-1945, talking about "the social frameworks of memory" (*les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*). Although his work attracted the attention of specialists in various fields, it is not very well known because it has not entirely been translated into English.[2] Halbwachs` pioneering, though incomplete, study on cultural memory, also provided a definition of cultural memory as a "deliberately unstable and socially constructed category".

Jan Assmann is also accredited with having coined the term „cultural memory" in 1992.[3] Unlike Maurice Halbwachs who considers that memory depends on socialisation and communication, excluding cultural memory, Assmann uses the term "cultural memory" but divides it into two categories so that to embrace both communicative memory and cultural memory, making a clear cut distinction between them.[4]

Cultural memory or the memory of culture has also been approached and defined in many ways as "the interplay of present and past in sociocultural contexts"[5] or "the memory supported by normative texts", as opposed to the communicative memory, "memories passed on by word of mouth".[6]

Although memory cannot be subsumed to a single disciple, literature has provided a valuable tool for recording individual experiences. Humanity seems to have been fighting the unstoppable process of forgetting by resorting to individual recollections and testimonies based on experiential memories. It has been noticed that the temporal distance from the historic or individual events has not influenced the respective memories negatively.

Shaping a victim`s memory. Ana Blandiana´s *resistance through culture, existence through culture, survival through culture*

Ana Blandiana can be put in relation with three concepts, both with the concept of *the resistance through culture* and with that of the *existence through culture* (which is in connection with the notion of the *cultural niches of existence*)[7], as well as with the concept of *survival through culture*, these concepts not being opposite. She has often lectured about the concept of *the resistance through culture* as the result of a major civic consciousness crisis, which has been defined as "going beyond the cultural limits set by the regime".[8] Another reference to this concept is made by Ion Simuț, who places it in connection with the resistance through culture both in the past and in the future centuries, both in Romania and in exile. According to him, culture can save us not only from totalitarian regimes, but also from all sorts of strange hindrances, including the aggressions of entertainment and kitsch which devour time and personality.[9]

However, the concept of the *resistance through culture* is not widely accepted. Blandiana herself talked about it as being a controversial topic.[10] Some critics have denied its existence entirely[11], others have doubted its scope. In this respect, the distinction between the zero compromises and the minor ones made by authors during totalitarian regimes has been debated, between "pragmatic behaviour" and "moral radicalism", as well as that between the "rigorous dignity of existing" and the "relative dignity of existing through culture", namely by "practicing a certain degree of adaptation to the conditions imposed by the political regime", the latter being in connection with Bogdan Crețu`s

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[2] Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collected Memory* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980).

[3] Jan Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization. Writing, Remembrance and Political Imagination* (Cambridge: CUP, 2011), 110.

[4] Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization,* 109-118.

[5] Astrid Erill, Ansgar N., *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook* (Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 2010), 10.

[6] Albrecht Schöne`s acceptance speech on being awarded the Reuchlin Prize on 17 January 1995 in Pforzheim, *Die Zeit*, 18 August, 1995, No. 34, 36.

[7] Gabriel Andreescu, *Existenţa prin cultură. Represiune, colaboraţionism şi rezistenţă intelectuală sub regimul comunist* (Iaşi: Polirom, 2015), 12.

[8] Our translation of the original „trecerea dincolo de limitele culturale permise de regim" from Andreescu, *Existenţa prin cultură*, 17.

[9] Ion Simuț, „Rezistenţa prin cultură, în exil", *România literară*, no. 13, 2004.

[10] „Rezistenţa prin cultură, o temă polemică" in *Anale Sighet 10. Anii 1973-1989: Cronica unui sfârşit de sistem*, ed. Romulus Rusan (Bucureşti: Fundaţia Academica Civică, 2003), 663.

[11] Alexandru Piru denied the existence of the concept of the resistance through culture in an interview published in *Disidenţă sau rezistenţă prin cultură. Dialoguri incomode realizate în primăvara anului 1991* (Timişoara: Helicon, 1993), 58.

disturbing question: "Would Romanian literature have been possible without such kind of *falls* during communism?".[12] However, the debate should be seen only as a warning against the distortion of the meaning of Memory by superficially approaching the life contexts and the human condition[13] of writers living during totalitarian regimes.

According to Blandiana, the entire history of literature is shaped by the relation between writers and power, writers and freedom, writers and the tragedy in which they live, in spite of which they manage to resist or, on the contrary, which turns them into victims: "Obviously, culture has more to do with survival than with struggle, but let's not forget that it is not about the physical survival of one being or another, but about the survival of a collective continuity, about saving the definition of a people that, without it, would become a mere population. In this respect, survival through culture is a profound, essential resistance."[14] Therefore, the best proof of the existence of such resistance through culture was the mocking the men of culture.

Blandiana establishes a connection between *the concept of the resistance through culture* and the concept of memory when she defines *the concept of resistance through culture* as a way in which the spirit manifests itself and as a form of the society`s memory.[15] Another definition of the concept is "an opposition to intellectual death, a form of survival understood not as opportunistic and superficial adaptation to the environment, but, on the contrary, as a deep subversion against the system, consisting in not giving up on precisely the values that the system had to destroy in order to defeat them. This survival through culture did not hope to defeat communism, but tried to counter it and lessen its effects on the deepest cells of the collective spirit".[16] So, according to Blandiana, the right question is not if there was a resistance through culture but if the resistance through culture could replace a political resistance.

One of Blandiana`s conferences, *Convertibilitatea suferinţei* (*The Convertibility of Suffering*),[17] should be put in connection with the above-mentioned concept of *the resistance through culture*. She uses a masterly crafted parable of the painter, the jailer and the window. The window painted by the prisoner in the cell becomes a metaphor of creation. The prisoner says: "I wanted to light up this cell and I did it. One can see the sky through my window. Its light forced you to close your eyes."[18] At a deeper level, the light of the sky makes the connection with God and has the power of comforting people, helping them resist the totalitarian regime. Any creator is connected to the divine spirit at a conscious or unconscious level. Talking about this parable, Blandiana herself noted: "(...) Symbolically, it (the parable) includes the essential elements of the world in which we have lived until recently: the prison and its main characters (the jailer and the prisoner), as well as the theme of escape, rendered in the only possible way, by resorting to absurdity. This was the only solution through which we, Romanians, managed to leave the world in which we had lived in the last 50 years. (...) The formula *we managed to leave* is not the most correct one. If the text had been a novel, it would not have been about a single prisoner, but about more than 20 million prisoners. Very few of them would have reacted like the painter in the *Open Window*. Most people would not even have dreamed that it was possible to paint a window or, if they had created it in a dream, they would not have had the courage to believe in its reality".[19]

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[12] Andreescu, *Existenţa prin cultură*, 16-18.

[13] Andreescu, *Existenţa prin cultură*, 18.

[14] Our translation of the original „În mod evident, cultura are mai mult de-a face cu supravieţuirea decât cu lupta, dar să nu uităm că nu este vorba despre supravieţuirea fizică a unei fiinţe sau a alteia, ci de supravieţuirea unei continuităţi colective, de salvarea definiţiei unui popor care în lipsa acesteia ar deveni o simplă populaţie. În acrest sens, supravieţuirea prin cultură este o rezistenţă profundă, esenţială". Ana Blandiana, „La ce bun poeţii în vremuri de restrişte?" in Ana Blandiana, *Istoria ca viitor şi alte conferinţe şi pagini* (Bucureşti: Humanitas, 2017), 144.

[15] Blandiana*,* „La ce bun poeţii în vremuri de restrişte?", 144.

[16] Our translation of the original: „o împotrivire la moartea intelectuală, o formă de supravieţuire înţeleasă nu ca acomodare oportunistă şi superficială la mediu, ci, dimpotrivă, ca o profundă subversiune a sistemului prin nerenunţarea la valorile pe care el trebuia, pentru a le învinge, să le distrugă. Această supravieţuire prin cultură nu spera să înfrângă comunismul, dar încerca să-i contracareze şi să-i diminueze efectele asupra celor mai profunde celule ale spiritului colectiv." Blandiana*,* „La ce bun poeţii în vremuri de restrişte?", 145.

[17] *The Convertibility of Suffering* is the name of a conference Blandiana delivered at Sorbine IV, Paris

[18] Our translation of the original: „Am vrut să luminez această celulă şi am luminat-o. Prin fereastra mea se zăreşte cerul. Iar lumina lui v-a obligat să închideţi ochii." Blandiana, *Istoria ca viitor şi alte conferinţe şi pagini*, 10.

[19] Our translation of the original: „(...) ea cuprinde, simbolic, elementele esenţiale ale lumii în care am trăit până nu demult: închisoarea şi personajele ei principale (temnicerul şi prizonierul), precum şi tema evadării, tratată în unica manieră posibilă,

With regard to *the existence through culture*, Ana Blandiana herself talked about her existence as being entirely dedicated to writing - a form of existing through culture by saving her own interiority, by acknowledging the fact that there is a definite meaning of her being: "Writing is my form of existence, the only possible one".[20] This type of confession makes her a good example of an existence through culture which has been defined as: "We will call *existence through culture* the fact that, for certain human beings, cultural activity gave meaning to their own lives. The vital energies were directed towards experiencing the cultural act".[21] The fact that Blandiana lived during a totalitarian regime, makes her existence even more dramatic. The poem *Elegie de dimineață* (*Morning Elegy*) is very suggestive in this respect. It is a metaphor of a writer`s purpose in life: to tell the truth and nothing but the truth, to nourish people with the truth, to be a Truth-Teller. Blandiana uses the metaphor of "to snow" or "to whiten" to express the work of a truth-teller poet, creating a "white artwork", as opposed to the metaphor of "sowing ashes"/ "the dust of the dead fire" to express the propaganda of a totalitarian regime.[22]

In order to understand the deep connection between the poet and poetry, we should also examine the poem *Torquato Tasso*, in which Blandiana is shown the poetry existing within her own body like an organ.[23] Because literature makes the human creator self-sufficient, and in the absolute absence of solidarity among people during communism, Blandiana considers all but natural to do her best as a poet and writer, that is to keep writing, thus providing an unconventional remedy against a totalitarian regime, helping people survive: "Personally, I think that I only did my duty as a writer, I only wrote what I thought and I tried to publish what I wrote. Sometimes I succeeded, sometimes I failed. The gesture of political resistance, the political gesture, the gesture by which a poem was transformed into a manifesto belongs to those who multiplied my pages, replacing the silence imposed on me by the authorities with their own reactions. (...) The resistance of culture belongs to the authors, the resistance through culture belongs to the public. (...) It is a type of profound resistance, which saves the living kernel of free thought. (...) But it is halfway between explicit political resistance and nothingness."[24]

Another concept in connection with Blandiana`s autobiographical writing is that of the *survival through culture* and it has been defined by Blandiana herself as being ``resistance to the pressure meant to bring forth the new man``[25]. Culture has also meant a refuge to hide away from any form of evil, be it the totalitarian regime, humiliation, fear, discouragement, depression, the crisis of artistic productivity, etc. It also meant a source of healing and comfort, of recovering dignity and hope. Immersing in culture, brings along the regeneration of the creative force, the peace of mind and

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prin absurd. Aceasta a fost singura soluție prin care noi, românii, am reușit să părăsim lumea în care am trăit ultimii 50 de ani. (...) formula „am reușit să părăsim" nu este formula cea mai corectă. Dacă textul ar fi fost un roman, n-ar mai fi fost vorba de un singur prizonier, ci de peste 20 de milioane, dintre care foarte puțini ar fi reacționat precum pictorul din *Fereastra deschisă*. Cei mai mulți nici n-ar fi visat că-i posibil să picteze o fereastră sau, dacă ar fi creat-o în vis, n-ar fi avut curajul să creadă în realitatea ei". Blandiana, *Istoria ca viitor și alte conferințe și pagini*, 10.

[20] Our translation of the original „Scrisul este forma mea de existență, singura posibilă`` (in the interview taken by Iulian Boldea to Ana Blandiana in *România literară*, no. 34, 2012.

[21] Our translation from the original: „Vom numi *existența prin cultură* faptul că, pentru anumite ființe umane, activitatea culturală dădea sens propriei lor vieți. Energiile vitale erau dirijate spre trăirea actului cultural". Andreescu, *Existența prin cultură,* 107.

[22] "At first I had promised to be silent, but then, in the morning,/ I saw you appearing with the ashes in the gates,/ Sowing the ashes as sowing the wheat,/ And I could not stand this anymore, I cried to myself: What are you doing? What are you doing? For you I snowed all night above the city,/ For you I whitened all night". My translation from the original: „La început făgăduisem să tac, dar apoi, dimineața,/ V-am văzut apărând cu cenușa în porți,/ Semănând cum se seamănă grâul, cenușa,/Și n-am mai putut, și-am strigat: Ce faceți? Ce faceți? Pentru voi am nins toată noaptea deasupra orașului,/ Pentru voi am albit toată noaptea".

[23] "And with outstretched finger/ He showed me the poetry in my body" our translation of „Și cu degetu-ntins/ Îmi arăta în trupul meu poezia."

[24] My translation from the original: „Personal, cred că nu mi-am făcut decât datoria de scriitor, nu am făcut decât să scriu ce credeam și să încerc să public ce am scris. Uneori am reușit, alteori nu am reușit. Gestul de rezistență, gestul politic, gestul prin care o poezie a fost transformată într-un manifest aparține celor care mi-au multiplicat paginile, înlocuindu-mi tăcerea impusă prin propriile lor reacții. (...) Rezistența culturii aparține autorilor, rezistența prin cultură aparține publicului. (...) Este un tip de rezistență profundă, care salvează sâmburele viu al gândirii libere. (...) Dar ea se află la jumătatea drumului între rezistența politică explicită și neant." Blandiana, „La ce bun poeții în vremuri de restriște?", 147.

[25] Our translation of the original: „rezistența față de presiunea menită să ducă la apariția omului nou". Rusan, *Anale Sighet 10. Anii 1973-1989:* 2003.

absolute freedom.

Ana Blandiana's autobiographical writing *The Past-Perfect-Tense*

Ana Blandiana`s *The Past-Perfect-Tense, Diary 31st of August 1988-12nd of December 1989 (Mai-Mult-Ca-Trecutul, Jurnal 31 august-12 decembrie 1989)* is illustrative for the idea of the *resistance-existence-survival through culture:* "Writing was one of the few forms in which you could resist all by yourself: just you, with your sheet of paper and your pencil."[26] This narrative casts light on the claustrophobic atmosphere of the communist regime which explains the huge importance of culture for the Romanian captive citizens, which has to function even in a time when it seems that nothing else functions: "the vacuum in which we were suffocating was populated by these cultural breathing exercises."[27] Therefore, it could be said that this autobiographical novel contains "parts of inner freedom",[28] the writer`s work being the result of a freedom which was severely limited by authorities.[29]

"when justice fails to be a form of memory, memory itself can be a form of justice", Blandiana wrote[30] Without being in favour of punishing the guilty ones at all costs and rather stressing the importance of analysing the guilts, she considers that the excess of memory could also be harmful: "Such terrifying chapters of history can be considered closed and unrepeatable only by analysing, delimiting and remembering what happened."[31] The author stresses the importance of making a clear cut distinction between good and evil. At the same time, she underlines the importance of defining evil in order to prevent it from repeating.

Ana Blandiana is a good example of a Romanian intellectual who is in a continuous inner struggle to self-analyse, to discern good from evil and to fight against any form of evil which can take the shape of compromises. This is not a very pleasant operation as it is always painful and troublesome and, sometimes, it can even have as a result extreme frustration and depression. This intricate process of self-scrutiny must be based on objectivity, courage and a sense of responsibility. It also implies the establishing of a ratio between herself, as an individuality and as a potential force, on the one hand, and the mentality and aspirations of the Romanian people as a whole, on the other hand. This hard path is the only possible path to be followed in order to reach one`s own real identity and value. And even if, as the result of this process, one discovers some failures in connection with the personal reaction to a totalitarian regime, by identifying and acknowledging them, by casting light on them in front of one`s own consciousness and in front of the public consciousness, the personal guilt diminishes. It is a continuous and perpetual process of personal exorcism, the only way to feel whole again at an individual level and useful for your people, which obviously implies validation in the future.

For Blandiana, the communist regime meant: "misery, repression, ration books, food rations, prisons. The terror and the misery which objectively is generated by it, was not only because of the monstrous character of those who organized this society, but also because of the fundamental principle which governed it, and according to which men were condemned to a happiness which they did not desire and with which they did not agree.".[32] Under these very hard circumstances, Blandiana felt all

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[26] Our translation of the original: „Scrisul era una din puținele forme în care puteai să reziști singur. Numai tu, cu foaia ta de hârtie și cu creionul tău". Ana Blandiana, „De la cenzura ca formă de libertate la libertatea ca formă de cenzură" in Blandiana, *Istoria ca viitor și alte conferințe și pagini*, 87.

[27] Our translation of: „vidul în care ne sufocam a fost populat de aceste exerciții de respirație prin cultură." Blandiana, „La ce bun poeții în vremuri de restriște?", 146.)

[28] „fragmente de libertate interioară". Ana Blandiana, „Paradoxul fragmentelor de libertate" in Blandiana, *Istoria ca viitor și alte conferințe și pagini*, 130.

[29] "freedom becomes creative only by limitation" our translation of the original „libertatea devine creatoare prin limită". Ana Blandiana, „Libertatea invizibilă" in Blandiana, *Istoria ca viitor și alte conferințe și pagini*, 132.

[30] Our translation of the original: „Când justiția nu reușește să fie o formă de memorie, memoria singură poate fi o formă de justiție`` (Ana Blandiana, „Memoria ca formă de justiție in Blandiana", in Blandiana, *Istoria ca viitor și alte conferințe și pagini*, 36).

[31] Our translation of the original: „Numai analizând, delimitând și ținând minte ceea ce a fost se pot considera închise și irepetabile atât de înspăimântătoare capitole de istorie." Blandiana, „Memoria ca formă de justiție", 35.

[32] Our translation of the original: „mizerie, represiune, cartele, rații de alimente, închisori. Iar teroarea și mizeria care izvorăște obiectiv din ea nu se datorau doar caracterului monstruos al celor care au organizat această societate, ci chiar principiului fundamental care o guverna și conform căruia oamenii erau condamnați la o fericire pe care nu o doreau și cu care nu erau de acord". Blandiana, „Convertibilitatea suferinței", 14.

the more the burden of being a writer and the urge to do something meaningful. Pointing to another traumatizing event that took place during the communist regime, namely the demolition of churches, she confesses that: "(...) I couldn't help but think that I am contemporary with this moment, that in this moment something absolutely unique disappears and that, if my books survive, if I survive, people will judge me, saying I lived in this era without saying anything, without opposing such a crime. Then, more than ever, I had the feeling that I would be answering for everything that was going on around me, if I became what I had wanted to become, that is, a real writer. Obviously, my various reactions and the way I continued writing resulted from this."[33]

One of the many fights that Blandiana fought as a writer was against censorship, that is against the communist authorities` obsession to try to manipulate eternity, because the political power considered literature a perpetual threat.[34] At the same time, Blandiana was not allowed to publish anything during three periods: 1960-1964, 1985, 1988-1989. This interdiction was the trigger for writing *The Past-Perfect-Tense, Diary 31st of August 1988 -12nd of December 1989 (Mai-Mult-Ca-Trecutul, Jurnal 31 august 1988 - 12 decembrie 1989).* Without knowing at that time, it gave her the opportunity to turn her life, her very existence, into the raw material for a book. She started writing it on the 31st of August 1988, considering that the pages would never be published. Thus, the diary became a substitute for publishing literature. She has never considered it real literature but rather "notes"[35] to prevent oblivion. Blandiana is extremely intrigued to notice that a period of time of thirty years till the moment of the publication of the diary led to "the creation of version of the memory more distant from reality than from my very ideas about reality."[36] I this respect, mention should be made of Blandiana`s rhetorical question: ``Was I aware, at the very moment when I was writing it (the diary), of the fact that, if I hadn`t written it, I myself wouldn`t believe it?``[37] This confession brings forth other relevant questions about the capacity of literature to immortalize truth, on the one hand, and about the fact that memory can be misleading, as it does not necessary represent truth as it can be altered by the passing of time, on the other hand.

Analysis of some metaphors in connection with the memory of culture

Ana Blandiana`s *The Past-Perfect-Tense* is suffused with metaphors in connection with totalitarianism. First of all, mention should be made of the metaphors in connection with the people living in a totalitarian society. Their lives are full of fear, sadness, limitations, hunger, infinite queues for basic supplies, and the absence of light, both in the concrete (electricity) and in the metaphorical sense. The metaphor "grey figures, mineralised faces"[38] point to the people`s gloomy state of mind which characterizes people in a totalitarian regime. Romanian people seem to play a collective game. The famous hide-and-seek game is replace by the "play-the-fool game"[39] which is played by everybody.

A very important type of metaphors in the one in connection with what should be the purpose of a creator -a writer, in her case-, in a totalitarian regime. It is as if Blandiana feels that the entire burden of doing something in the totalitarian regime falls entirely on her shoulders. Permanently oscillating between writing and doing something more than this, her life is torn apart between the duty that she imposes upon herself and living a simple, common life. The never ending mental processes

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[33] Our translation of the original „(...) nu puteam să nu mă gândesc că sunt contemporană cu acest moment, că în acest moment dispare ceva absolut irepetabil și că, dacă lucrările mele vor rămâne, dacă eu voi rămâne, se va menționa că am trăit în această epocă fără să spun nimic, fără să mă împotrivesc unei asemenea crime. Am avut atunci, mai mult ca oricând, sentimentul că răspund, că voi răspunde, în măsura în care sunt ceea ce voiam să devin, adică un scriitor adevărat, pentru tot ceea ce se întâmplă în jurul meu. În mod evident, din acest sentiment au decurs diversele mele reacții și felul în care am continuat să scriu". (Ana Blandiana, „De la cenzura ca formă de libertate la libertatea ca formă de cenzură" in Blandiana, *Istoria ca viitor și alte conferințe și pagini*, 79-80).

[34] Blandiana, „La ce bun poeții în vremuri de restriște?", 149.

[35] Ana Blandiana, *Mai-Mult-Ca-Trecutul, Jurnal 31 august 1988-12 decembrie 1989* (București: Humanitas, 2023), 18.

[36] Our translation of the original „(...) lectura întârziată cu aproape treizeci de ani a făcut posibilă apariția unei versiuni a memoriei mai independentă față de realitate decât față de ideile mele despre realitate." Blandiana, *Mai-Mult-Ca-Trecutul,* 19.

[37] Our translation of the original „Am știut oare atunci când le-am scris că dacă nu le-aș fi scrie nu le voi mai crede nici eu?" Blandiana, *Mai-Mult-Ca-Trecutul,* 19.

[38] Our translation of the original „figure cenușii: mineralizate de tristețe." Blandiana, *Mai-mult-ca-trecutul*, 275.

[39] Our translation of the original „jocul de-a face pe prostul pe care îl joacă întreg poporul." Blandiana, *Mai-mult-ca-trecutul*, 170.

pointing to a permanent mental unrest which torments Blandiana is perfectly rendered by means of the "the octopuses of thoughts"[40] metaphor. It is only extremely rarely when she succeeds in liberating her soul totally of any duty, burden and unrest. Then, she manages to be "without any ashes in my soul."[41]

According to Blandiana, the duty that a writer should have is immense, most often than not incomprehensible to common people. In this respect, Blandiana uses the doctor metaphor, in the sense that a writer should be a doctor in a society which resembles more and more a hospital, a bedlam.[42] The permanent pressure that she felt about her duty of writing makes her perceive the white, unwritten sheet of paper as a "white beast".[43] The fact of not writing becomes "a fragment of suicide"[44]. The process of writing is exhausting, Blandiana pointing to it by means of the birth metaphor. After writing a book, she has the feeling that "I have given birth to a child".[45] At the same time, the publishing of a book becomes "the most resistant weapon against evil",[46] an equivalent to "setting fire to herself in the Parliament Market".[47] The process of writing is essential. It becomes "more important than sacrifice"[48] as it is the only one that can save people.[49] The diary itself becomes "a space of sufferings and daily complications".[50]

One of the negative effects of living in a totalitarian regime is the fact that you cannot trust anybody. In this respect, Blandiana uses the metaphor of "the secret barrier"[51] existing among people. The lack of trust in her fellows makes her feel that she is moving "among nails".[52]

Other metaphors refer to the ways of surviving in a totalitarian society. The metaphor "we live by hanging by the radio"[53] points to the fact that Romanians were listening to Radio România Liberă, which was broadcasting from abroad and was the only reliable source of information during communism. They were afraid their neighbours might hear them but, nevertheless, they continued tuning in to this radio every single night. For many, it was a beacon of light in the insurmountable darkness around.

Another way to survive is the daily ritual of putting a mask in society. That mask is about hiding anything which is unacceptable to be felt in a totalitarian regime, such as sadness, fear, disgust, revolt. Thus, it is rendered by means of the "society apparatus".[54]

Conclusions

Ana Blandiana`s individual memory, as it is recorded in her autobiographical writing *The Past-Perfect-Tense, Diary 31st of August-12nd of December 1989* (*Mai-Mult-Ca-Trecutul, Jurnal 31 august 1988 -12 decembrie 1989*), is illustrative for the memory of culture or the cultural memory. She considers that memory is a form of justice. According to her, the excess of memory is also harmful and the importance of remembering lies in the fact that we understand the very essence of evil in order to prevent it to happening again in the future.

The diary came into being as a response to one of the three periods in which she was not allowed to publish and, initially, it was not written with the intention to be published. The author did not consider it real literature but rather "notes". It is very interesting to notice that a thirty years` period until the moment of its publication led to the creation of a version of the memory more distant

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[40] Our translation of the original: ,,caracatițele gândurilor". Blandiana, *Mai-mult-ca-trecutul*, 401.

[41] Our translation of the original: ,,fără nicio cenușă în suflet". Blandiana, *Mai-mult-ca-trecutul*, 456.

[42] ``(…) I, for whom life is a hospital, perhaps even a hospice in which, no matter how sick I may be, the part I have to play is that of the doctor `` our translation of the original ,,(...) eu, pentru care viața este un spital, poate chiar un ospiciu în care, oricât aș fi de bolnavă, rolul meu este acela de doctor". Blandiana, *Mai-mult-ca-trecutul*, 463.

[43] Our translation of the original: ,,fiară albă". Blandiana, *Mai-mult-ca-trecutul*, 446.

[44] Our translation of the original: ,,un fragment de sinucidere". Blandiana, *Mai-mult-ca-trecutul*, 277.

[45] Our translation of the original: ,,am senzația că am născut ". Blandiana, *Mai-mult-ca-trecutul,* 340.

[46] Our translation of the original: ,,cea mai rezistentă armă împotriva răului". Blandiana, *Mai-mult-ca-trecutul,* 343.

[47] Our translation of the original: ,,a-și da foc în Piața Parlamentului". Blandiana, *Mai-mult-ca-trecutul*, 443.

[48] Our translation of the original: ,,numai scrisul poate salva". Blandiana, *Mai-mult-ca-trecutul*, 377.

[49] Our translation of the original: ,,scrisul e mai important ca jertfa". Blandiana, *Mai-mult-ca-trecutul*, 380.

[50] Our translation of the original: ,,spațiu al suferințelor și complicațiilor zilnice". Blandiana, *Mai-mult-ca-trecutul*, 509.

[51] Our translation of the original: ,,tristețea unei bariere secrete". Blandiana, *Mai-mult-ca-trecutul*, 347.

[52] Our translation of the original: ,,senzația că mă mișc printre cuie". Blandiana, *Mai-mult-ca-trecutul*, 295.

[53] Our translation of the original: ,,Trăim agățați de radio". Blandiana, *Mai-mult-ca-trecutul*, 335.

[54] Our translation of the original: ,,aparat de societate". Blandiana, *Mai-mult-ca-trecutul*, 450.

from reality than from Blandiana`s very ideas about reality.

This autobiographical writing contains many metaphors that can be put in relation with the memory of culture. They point to the communist regime, to the people living in a totalitarian society, to what should be the purpose of a creator - a writer - in a totalitarian regime, to the ways of surviving in a totalitarian society etc.

The diary can be put in relation with three concepts: the concept of *the resistance through culture,* that of the *existence through culture* (which is in connection with the notion of the *cultural niches of existence)* and the concept of *the survival through culture*.

Although the concept of *the resistance through culture* is rather controversial, Blandiana talks about its existence. In this respect, she mentions the writer`s very act of writing as being one of resistance. At the same time, she defines *resistance through culture* as an opposition to intellectual death, a deep subversion against the communist system, aiming at countering it and diminishing its effects. The parable of the painter, the jailer and the window is very suggestive in this respect, pointing the immense power of creation to help people survive any form of totalitarianism.

With regard to *the existence through culture*, Ana Blandiana talked about her existence as being entirely dedicated to writing, poetry existing within her own body like an organ. She defines *existence through culture* by the fact that, for certain human beings, cultural activity gives meaning to their own lives, the vital energies being directed towards experiencing the cultural act. In Blandiana`s opinion, culture has more to do with survival than with struggle. She even provided a definition for the concept of *survival through culture* as resistance to the pressure meant to bring forth the new person.

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RE-GENDERING THE NATION-STATE: TAKARAZUKA REVUE´S PARADIGM SHIFTS IN SNOW TROUPE´S HISTORICAL PERFORMANCES SINCE 2015

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Rezumat: Lucrarea actuală observă critic abordarea trecutului istoric al Japoniei de către Takarazuka Revue, şi anume eforturile acestei instituţii de a recalibra perioada Edo (1603-1868) prin intermediul reprezentării performative a trupei de zăpadă începând cu *Noaptea in care s-au întâlnit stelele* din 2015. De la înfiinţarea sa în anul 1914, Takarazuka Revue a devenit în timp cea mai celebră instituţie de consum cultural din Japonia în cadrul industriei moderne de divertisment; semnul distinctiv al companiei de teatru muzical Takarazuka Revue este distribuţia sa exclusiv feminină, angajând actriţe atât în roluri masculine (*otokoyaku*) cât şi în roluri feminine (*musumeyaku*), împărţite în cinci trupe care aduc pe scenele celor două teatre majore din Japonia de Vest (Takarazuka Grand Theatre în oraşul Takarazuka) şi din Japonia de Est (Tokyo Takarazuka Theatre în elegantul cartierul Ginza din capitala Japoniei) o mare diversitate de subiecte acoperind toate genurile şi zonele istorico-geografice, în cadrul celor zece spectacole săptămânale de-a lungul întregului an. Subiectele sunt încorporate în spectacole de teatru live cu muzică uşoară occidentală, coregrafii complexe şi coruri copleşitoare, scenografii ameţitoare, arhitectură scenică dinamică şi realistă, costume sclipitoare care se schimbă rapid la fel ca şi perucile – întregul conglomerat fiind multiplicat de expuneri discrete de excelenţă individuală. Scopul acestui protocol analitic este de a dezvălui câteva dintre strategiile performative şi discursive de redefinire a statului-naţiune japonez în modernitatea târzie, punând sub semnul întrebării înseşi întemeierea acestuia la mijlocul secolului al XIX-lea în Japonia: astfel, distanţarea de sloganurile familiare proclamând unicitatea, armonia, excepţionalism japonez, ar permite integrarea treptată autentica în comunitatea globală, în conformitate cu provocările, temerile, disperările actuale şi in vederea soluţiilor acestora: creative, progresive, durabile – şi înainte de toate, orientate către viitor.

Abstract: This paper observes critically Takarazuka Revue's approach to Japan's historical past with particular focus on its efforts to recalibrate the Edo period (1603-1868) by means of performative representation since snow troupe's 2015 *The Night When the Stars Met*. Japan's most popular institution of cultural consumption within the modern entertainment industry since its inception in 1914, Takarazuka Revue's hallmark is its all-female cast impersonating both male (*otokoyaku*) and female (*musumeyaku*) roles divided in five performing troupes which bring on the stages of the two major theatres in West-Japan (Takarazuka Grand Theatre in the city of Takarazuka) and in East-Japan (Tokyo Takarazuka Theatre in the posh district of Ginza in Japan's capital) during ten weekly performances throughout the entire year a huge diversity of topics covering all genres and historical-geographical areas. These are embedded in theatrical live performances with Western popular music, laborious choreographies and impressing singing acts, luxurious stage designs, sparkling – and quickly changing – costumes compounded by discrete displays of individual excellence. The goal of the analytical protocol is to unveil performative and discursive strategies of redefining the nation-state in late-modernity by questioning its very foundation by mid-19th century in Japan: thus, the departure from familiar refrains of uniqueness, harmony, exceptionalism, allows for a gradual genuine integration within the global community, in line with current challenges, anxieties, despairs and towards their creative, progressive, sustainable, future-oriented solutions.

Cuvinte-cheie: Teatru musical, (re-)inventarea tradiţiilor, (re-)negocierea modernităţii, ierarhii de valori, modernitatea târzie, masculinitate, feminitate.

Keywords: musical theatre, (re-)invention of traditions, (re-)negotiation of modernity, late-modernity, hierarchies of values, masculinity, femininity.

Introduction: transcending the historical past

The demystification of the past and the disenchantment resulting from this process is an essential step for individuals and collectives alike in gaining a healthy sense of being-in-the-world which consequentially leads to the pursuit and eventually achievement of self-actualization, in Jung's terms.[1] In Japan's case, premodernity and more specifically Edo-period (1603-1868) have been since the beginning of its modernization which started with 1868's Meiji Restauration and more acutely since the humiliating defeat in WWII, crucial systems of reference: symbolical spaces of peace and harmony which celebrated the uniqueness of the Japanese people living in eternal harmony with nature and among themselves. Nonetheless, like in individuals' cases who cannot fully mature due to clinging to the protective, idealized framework of childhood, collectives and nations also cannot move forward towards the future through the active involvement in the present unless they leave behind the past as a repository of memories – and perhaps nothing more. This paper observes critically Takarazuka Revue's approach to Japan's historical past with particular focus on Edo period. The goal of the analytical endeavor is to address the strategies employed by Takarazuka Revue Company in its efforts to recalibrate Edo period's referentiality by means of performative representation, while dramaturgically pointing out the necessity to review obsolete discourses on nation-building and nation-preservation in light of recent or current findings. As to be shown further below, Takarazuka Revue's inherent femininity of its all-female cast underscores this project of symbolically re-gendering the nation-state.

Traditionally associated with strictly conservative gender politics and socio-economic hierarchies, military-like instruction methods and performance standards which transcend the wildest expectations while pushing the entertainment industry beyond the limitations of technological progress, fans' requirements and technocrats' visions, Takarazuka Revue has been accompanying Japan since its foundation in 1914. Simultaneously a faithful mirror of Japanese society and a lucid barometer-like institution for the future, Takarazuka Revue's hallmark is its all-female cast impersonating both male (*otokoyaku*) and female (*musumeyaku*) roles divided in five performing troupes which bring on the stages of the two major theatres in West-Japan (Takarazuka Grand Theatre in the city of Takarazuka) and in East-Japan (Tokyo Takarazuka Theatre in the posh district of Ginza in Japan's capital) during ten weekly performances throughout the entire year a huge diversity of topics covering all genres and historical-geographical areas. These are embedded in theatrical live performances with Western popular music, laborious choreographies and impressing singing acts, luxurious stage designs, sparkling – and quickly changing – costumes, compounded by discrete displays of individual excellence.[2] Moreover, since 1974's blockbuster *The Rose of Versailles* (『ベルサイユのばら』, directed by Ueda Shinji 植田 紳爾 [born 1933]), Takarazuka Revue has been essentially circumscribing the so-called *shôjo* culture: the framework delineating femininity, feminine identity and feminine corporeality by means of instrumentalizing female teenagers within Japan's rapacious systems juxtaposing consumerism, sexuality and public discourses on love, marriage, reproduction.[3] In recent years, especially since the beginning of the new era in Japanese historiography in 2019 (the Reiwa period) and even more accelerated since the big reset posited by the global pandemic of 2020-2022, a tremendous paradigm shift has been occurring with a renewed focus on expanding the traditional business model centred around "deep fandom",[4] referring to a rigidly delineated fan community composed mainly of stay-at-home housewives and financially powerful female seniors, aged 35 and above, towards a more diverse consumers' basis to include male

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[1] Erich Fromm, *The Art of* Loving (New York: Harper and Row, 1956), 52-57; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London/New York: Verso, 1991), 32.

[2] Masao Hashimoto, *Subarashii Takarazuka Kageki: Yume to Roman no 85 Toshi* (Takarazuka: Takarazuka Kagekidan, 1999), 32-41; Kenko Kawasaki, *Takarazuka, Shôhi Shakai no Supekutakuru* (Tokyo: Kôdansha, 1999), 120; Mariko Yamanashi, *A History of Takarazuka Revue since 1914* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 11-13.

[3] Hiroshi Watanabe, *Takarazuka Kageki no Hen'yô to Nihon Kindai* (Tokyo: Shinshokan, 1999), 73; Neil Nehring, *Popular Music, Gender, and Postmodernism* (Thousand Oaks/London/New Delhi: Sage, 1997), 33-34.

[4] Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* (London/New York: Routledge, 1992), 95.

theatre-goers of all ages, reflected in correspondingly diversified performances to encompass a greater variety of preferences, interests and ideals.

The year 2015 was an important year: After 2014's flamboyant anniversary of Takarazuka Revue's centennial history, 2015 brought forth three major paradigm shifts in its representation strategy in three out of the yearly nine performances orchestrating. The first such pivotal performance was *1789: The Lovers of Bastille* (『1789：バスティユーの恋人たち』, moon troupe), the Japanese adaption of the French rock-opera *1789: Les Amants de la Bastille*, with music by Dove Attia, Laurent Delort, Louis Delort, Rod Janois, Jean-Pierre Pilot, Benoit Poher, William Rousseau and Olivier Schultheis as well as lyrics by Attia and Vincent Baguian and a book by Attia and François Chouquet, which had its world-premiere 10. October 2012 at Palais des Sports de Paris, world-premiered in 2012 at Palais des sports de Paris): *1789: The Lovers of Bastille* manifested a sharp U-turn from the blockbuster *The Rose of Versailles* (1974) which had determined Takarazuka Revue's public image – and self-orchestration – as a fundamental part of the *shôjo* culture since mid-1970s. The second performance was *A Song for Kingdoms* (『王家に捧ぐ歌』, cosmos troupe) based on the opera *Aida* (1871) by Giuseppe Verdi with a libretto by Antonio Gislanzoni and a remake of the identical star troupe's 2003 performance: it carries the subtle but powerful metamorphose of message from "peace is the highest and the most precious of ideals of all humans" (in 2003) into "in order to attain and keep peace, there are times when war is necessary" (in 2015). The third performance was *The Night When the Stars Met* (『星逢一夜』, snow troupe): it is an essential deconstruction of the Edo rhetoric and the *bushidô* ideology presented as deeply toxic through the focus on a star-crossed love story projected on the tragic background of three children's friendship.

Since 2015's *The Night When the Stars Met* until the writing of this analysis (May 2024), snow troupe staged four more performances categorized as *jidaimono* (時代物, historical performances) and/or *nihonmono* (日本物, Japanese historical performances): snow troupe's employment is crucial in this context, as among the five active troupes – flower troupe 花組 *hana-gumi*, moon troupe 月組 *tsuki-gumi* (both founded in 1921), snow troupe 雪組 *yuki-gumi* (founded in 1924), star troupe 星組 *hoshi-gumi* (1933-1939 and since 1948), cosmos troupe 宙組 *sora-gumi* (since 1998) –, each being associated with specific characteristics which then colour the message of the performances themselves, snow troupe stands out – or better said: used to stand out until 2015 – due to its conservative atmosphere in bringing forth "traditional Japan" with its classic imagery of the stress-ratio between *giri* (義理, social obligations) and *ninjô* (人情, individual emotions) as the highest form of human transcendence encapsulated within plots commonly set in premodern Japan.[5] Inaugurated in 1924, simultaneously with the opening of the first Takarazuka Grand Theatre, snow troupe is considered the upholder of traditional dance and opera for the whole company and has the reputation of being the vanguard of classical Japanese drama.[6] When it tends towards Western material, it "domesticates"[7] it by inserting familiar elements to its audiences: on this backdrop, the fact that it premiered in Japan in 1996 the 1992's Vienna-original musical *Elisabeth: The Rondo of Love and Death* (『エリザベート：愛と死の輪舞（ロンド）』, with a book and lyrics by Michael Kunze and music by Sylvester Levay), which would turn into one of Takarazuka Revue's long-term blockbusters, has symbolical underpinnings, with 'appropriation' and 'Japanisation' being among the main preoccupations (or insinuations). Moreover, part of Takarazuka Revue administration's post-war policy to never again represent Japan or Asia in modern times resulted from its nefarious – and unconditional – support of Japan's expansionist militarist colonialist politics in the first decades of the 20th century,[8] Takarazuka Revue's *jidaimono* performances make up ca. 30% of the yearly program; while other troupes equally stage Japan-themed performances and snow troupe takes over various

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[5] Hashimoto, *Subarashii Takarazuka Kageki*, 55-59; Kawasaki, *Takarazuka, Shôhi Shakai no Supekutakuru*, 29;

[6] Jennifer Ellen Robertson, *Takarazuka: Sexual Politics and Popular Culture in Modern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California, 1998), 53; Hiroshi Watanabe, *Nihon-Bunka Modan Rapusodî* (Tokyo: Shunjûsha, 2002), 174.

[7] Kôichi Iwabuchi, "Pop-Culture Diplomacy in Japan", *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, Volume 21, Issue 4 (2015): 419-432, 425; Joseph Tobin, "Domesticating the West." in *Re-Made in Japan: Everyday Life and Consumer Taste in a Changing Society*, ed. Joseph Tobin (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1992), 13.

[8] Watanabe, *Takarazuka Kageki*, 152; Kenko Kawasaki, *Takarazuka to iu Yûtopia* (Tokyo: Iwanami, 2005), 97.

narrative lines as well, snow troupe's major feature is the referential "Japaneseness" in the *wakon yôsai* ("Japanese spirit/roots, Western technology/knowledge") framework which underlies Takarazuka Revue's hybridity in tune with Japan's modernity and delivers the crucial "Japanising" element(s) to all its performances – Japan-related or not.

Moreover, among 2015's three revolutionary performances, *The Night When the Stars Met* is of particular interest as it inaugurates a brutal shift without any transition from the previous outright idealization of modernity and its *giri-ninjô* dichotomic transcendence towards the revelation of Edo period as a cruel era of oppression and blatant social inequalities, void of any fundamental human values such as compassion or mercy, yet constructed as peaceful, harmonious and prosperous after it ended in bloody confrontations during the *bakumatsu* (幕末 "the end of the curtain", the last years of the shogunate by mid-19th century). Accordingly, the *bakumatsu* events were profoundly modified to suit the ideology of the Meiji technocrats and dutifully employed until present-day Japan as a wholesome contrast to the loss of identity, purpose and altogether Japaneseness due to Japan's forced modernization after 1868 and even more so after 1945.[9] Snow troupe's four *jidaimono* after 2015's *The Night When the Stars Met* until the moment of this writing (May 2024) are analysed in this paper: *Rurouni Kenshin* (『るろうに剣心』, 2016) based in the eponymous cross-medial phenomenon centring on the wandering samurai with excellent fighting abilities Himura Kenshin of early Meiji era who had dutifully contributed to the Meiji Restoration but decided afterwards to employ his skills for the protection of regular citizens; *The Sun in the Last Days of the Shogunate* (『幕末太陽傳』, 2017) based on the eponymous movie by Kawashima Yûzô 川島雄三 (1918– 1963) from 1956, a typical "hotel tale" within the confines of a 1862 brothel and its inhabitants; *When the Last Sword Is Drawn* (『壬生義士伝』, 2019, based on the eponymous novel by Asada Jirô 浅田次郎 published in 2000) on the life-story of a lower-class samurai from Hokkaidô joining the *shinsengumi* and belonging to the victims of civil war (the armed confrontations prior to Meiji Restoration) never described as such in historical discourses; *Yumesuke's Dream: Senryô Souvenir* (『夢介千両みやげ』, 2022, based on the novel of the same name by Yamate Kiichirô 山手 樹一郎 [1899-1978]) on the quotidian life in Edo (nowadays Tokyo) through the lens of a dating couple's endeavors.

Based on more than two decades of on-site fieldwork comprised of extensive phenomenological experiences and detailed empiric inquiries with both producers and consumers of Japanese popular culture and, distinctively, of Takarazuka Revue's releases as well as comprehensive archival literature research, this paper aims at hermeneutically elucidating the mechanisms underlying the performative deconstruction of Japanese premodernity by means of confronting audiences with uncomfortable historical facts related to the emergence and establishment of the modern nation-state while offering credible visions of the future based on universal values of (healthy) self-love, compassion and mutual respect: the very fact that these values are taken for granted by late-modern social participants leads to them being jeopardized through populist discourses on "the greater good", "pastoral premodernity", "technological evil". Therefore, raising awareness of their historical perishability in light of a tragic, often unpalatable past, functions as a sustainable counter-force to current global efforts employed in the dissolution of modernity and its accomplishments towards their replacement with new forms of autocracy, totalitarianism and oppression. After the detailed analysis of the five performances, the Conclusion briefly delves into the impact snow troupe's initial 2015 performance *The Night When the Stars Met* delivered to Edo period's representation by the remaining four troupes ever since: the subtle yet profound shift from absolute idealization to gradual realism.

Healing toxic nostalgia: *The Night When the Stars Met* (2015)
The snow troupe's performance *The Night When the Stars Met* was staged at Takarazuka Grand Theatre from 17. July 2015 until 17. August 2015 and at Tokyo Takarazuka Theatre from 4. September 2015 until 11. October 2015; it was directed by Ueda Kumiko 田久 美子, and had Sagiri Seina 早霧 せいな and Sakihi Miyu 咲妃 みゆ in the lead-roles of a provincial samurai named

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[9] Anne Allison, *Precarious Japan* (Durham: Duke University, 2013), 23; Marilyn Ivy, *Discourses of Vanishing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 61.

Amano Haruoki, also known as Kinosuke, compelled to live at the central court in Edo (nowadays Tokyo) due to his exceptional ability to read the stars, and his childhood sweetheart Sen. Sen belongs to the oppressed farmers' majority living in unfathomable poverty, and ends up marrying their common friend Genta, a plain village boy admirably enacted by Nozomi Fûto 望海 風斗: set in mid-Edo period during the reign of Tokugawa Yoshimune,[10] *The Night When the Stars Met* opens the series of the plays questioning the almighty ideology of the inescapable adversity encapsulated in the tension between *giri* (義理, social obligations) and *ninjô* (人情, individual emotions), [11] circumscribing the vast majority of dramatic plots in premodern Japan and immutably permeating the current social reality.

Since 1946 until 2015, Takarazuka Revue's historical performances located in Japan or Asia strictly followed the post-war strategy of not representing Japanese or Asian people in modern or contemporary times.[12] This performance vision had been decreed due to Takarazuka Revue's pre-war representation of history and, more importantly, due to its highly nefarious involvement with politics and military campaigns during WWII (Pacific War). With cosmos troupe's notable exceptions from 2008 and sharply rejected by its fan-base, all *nihonmono* or Japanese historical performances had to focus on premodern times with a keen interest in Edo period (1603-1868) with its all-encompassing Neo-Confucianist ideology of the *bushidô* (武士道, "the way of the warrior" or "the way of the samurai") and the inherently highly romanticised tragedy of the stress-ratio between *giri* and *ninjô*.[13] The remarkable foundation for this approach was 1982's *Lovers' Suicide: Love in Yamatoji* (『心中：恋の大和路』, based on Chikamatsu Monzaemon's *The Courier for Hell* (『冥途の飛脚』 *Meido no hikyaku*) from 1711:[14] Takarazuka Revue's version centres on Kameya Chûbei 亀屋忠兵衛, who is a young master of a courier service and deeply in love with Umegawa 梅川, an indentured courtesan. In despair because he cannot pay off her contract and therefore she will soon be sent away to a rich man in the country, he takes money entrusted to his business and opens the seal. As the penalty for stealing money is death, his friends try to talk him out of it, but he is resolute and pays off Umegawa's contract. When she learns the truth, Umegawa offers to die then and there, but Chûbei argues that they should stay alive, as dying is easy, and they can do it at any time. The two then flee the city, heading for Yamatoji, where Chûbei hopes to find his real father and get them aid. On the road, they evade their pursuers, among them being Chûbei's friend Tanbaya Hachiemon 丹波屋八右衛門 who is determined to help them. In the end, the exhausted couple finds awful rumours have come ahead of them; Chûbei's father gives Umegawa what small money he has, saying he does not want for them to die, but definitely distances himself from them forever. Just as their pursuers catch up, Hachiemon reaches them. He talks the pursuers out of following, because it is certain that the two will die in the cold snows on the mountains that they have headed into.[15] After star troupe's initial staging at the smaller Bow Hall inside Takarazuka Grand Theatre, commonly reserved for atypical or

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[10] Best known for repealing the ban on Western literature, Tokugawa Yoshimune 徳川 吉宗 (1684-1751), the eighth shogun of the Tokugawa shogunate, ruled from 1716 until his abdication in 1745. He was the son of Tokugawa Mitsusada 徳川 光貞 (1627-1705), the grandson of Tokugawa Yorinobu 徳川 頼宣 (1602-1671) and the great-grandson of Tokugawa Ieyasu 徳川 家康 (1543-1616; born Matsudaira Takechiyo 松平 竹千代), the founder of the Tokugawa dynasty itself, which overlapped with Edo or Tokugawa period (1603-1868). R.H.P. Mason, and J. G. Caiger, *A History of Japan* (North Clarendon: Tuttle Press, 1979), 72.

[11] J. L. McClain, *Japan: A Modern History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002), 173; Mason and Caiger, *A History of Japan*, 84-87.

[12] Hashimoto, *Subarashii Takarazuka Kageki*, 201; Toshihiro Tsuganesawa, *Takarazuka Kageki Senryaku: Kobayashi Ichizô no Seikatsu-Bunkaron* (Tokyo: Kôdansha, 1991), 38; Yoshitsugu Iwahori, *Isai Kobayashi Ichizô no Shôhô: Sono Taishô Shikô no Rejâ Keiei Shuhô* (Tokyo: Hyôgensha, 1972), 93.

[13] See McClain, *Japan*, 191; Mason, and Caiger, J. G., *A History of Japan*, 101-105.

[14] Chikamatsu Monzaemon 近松 門左衛門, real name Sugimori Nobumori 杉森 信盛, 1653-1725. Brian Powell, *Japan's Modern Theatre: A Century of Change and Continuity* (London: Japan Library, 2002), 121.

[15] Powell, *Japan's Modern Theatre*, 142; Benito Ortolani, *The Japanese Theatre: From Shamanistic Ritual to Contemporary Pluralism* (Princeton/New Jersey: Princeton University, 1995), 21.

challenging performances, *Lovers' Suicide: Love in Yamatoji* gained traction, being re-staged countless times ever since by all five troupes: the ruthless romanticisation of suicide – or double-suicide – seemed to pull at sensitive strings within audiences' subconscious yearnings for emotional intimacy and closeness, even when they meant death.

Various other performances adopted this stance, until 2015's snow troupe's *The Night When the Stars Met* radically urged audiences to rethink Japan's historico-geographical position as well as its continuous delusional referentiality to the premodern past. The tragic story of the romantic triangle between Kinosuke/Amano Haruoki, Sen and Genta reverberates in the collective subconscious of contemporary predominantly female Japanese audiences with subliminal instructions of compassion and resistance. It also brings forth the increasing awareness that returning to the past, even symbolically or as a means to withdraw from current realities at times too uncomfortable to deal with, is not an alternative anymore and that decisive action, proactive gestures of liberation and empowerment are both existentially necessary and pragmatically inevitable.[16] Thus, in the fragile, slender stature of the *takarasienne* as individuals and as a collective, one can discover a dynamic alternative to the late-modern Japanese everyday life, infused with Western influences, dominated by consumerism, suffocated by excess and surplus – and other than mentally, emotionally, spiritually returning to a past which had never existed as such. Through the dissolution of Edo period's iron grip of on present-day Japan, the past has slowly but irreversibly turned from a delusional reference system into a repository of lessons to be incorporated within the history yet to come.

Learning to live with oneself: *Rurouni Kenshin* (2016)

When Takarazuka Revue Company took over the *Rurouni Kenshin* topic[17] and transformed it into a live performance, there were two main challenges it had to deal with: the (predominantly) female audience and the limitations of the live theatrical genre. Staged at Takarazuka Grand Theatre from 5. February 2016 until 14. March 2016 and at Tokyo Takarazuka Theatre from 1. April 2016 until 8. May 2016, with the same "golden combination" from *The Night When the Stars Met*, consisting of topstar-*otokoyaku* Sagiri Seina as Himura Kenshin and topstar-*musumeyaku* Sakihi Miyu as Kamiya Kaoru, the transition from the manga/animation version of the *Rurouni Kenshin* representation of history to its version with human actors – initially in live-action movies and subsequently in all-female live theatrical performances – was facilitated by what might be labelled "latent cross-mediality" of the Japanese entertainment industry, with popular plots and topics migrating between mediatic levels with various degrees of success.[18] The socio-cultural contextualization of Takarazuka Revue as the self-advertised "icon of Japan" and a "world of love" with its actresses, particularly its female impersonators of male roles promoted as symbols of masculinity and pioneers of social change, occurs within the framework of its institutional position encapsulated in the highly corporate-like entertainment industry in Japan, and enclosed by the cultural-intellectual hybridization which occurred in Japan since 1868.[19] On the broader background of the actresses' strict educational system within the Takarazuka Music Academy, in which "friendship, hard-work and (individual) excellence"[20] serve the more comprehensive model of a dynamic community based on compassion, respect and trust among its members – after all, the

[16] Perry Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity* (London/New York: Verso, 1988), 33-39.

[17] *Rurouni Kenshin*'s powerfully cross-medial presence as a franchise results from its position as an emblematic case of "media transfer" or cross-mediality: it had started as a popular *shônen* manga targeted at male teenagers by mid-1990s with sequels in early 2010s, including an additional light novel in 1996, evolving to a cult television animation series and six OVAs targeted at the same *shônen* audience from 1996 until 2001, and four live-action movies released in 2012, 2014 and 2021. Until today, the "Rurouni Kenshin" brand remains in the consciousness of 1990s' teenagers as a symbol of faith and empowerment in strong contradiction with the reality of Japan's so-called "lost decade", even though the initial teenagers have meanwhile turned into middle-aged citizens deeply embedded in the Japanese society. See Patrick Drazen, *Anime explosion! – The What? Why? & Wow! of Japanese Animation* (Berkeley: Stone Bridge, 2003), 97-103; Kazuhiro Furuhashi, *Rurouni Kenshin: Meiji-Kenkaku Rôman-tan* (Tokyo: Studio Gallop/Studio Deen, 1996-1998); Watsuki, Nobuhiro, *Rurouni Kenshin: Meiji-Kenkaku Rôman-tan* (Tokyo: Shûeisha/Shônen Jump, 1994-1999).

[18] Powell, *Japan's Modern Theatre*, 68; Ortolani, *The Japanese Theatre*, 112; Takaoka, Nobuyuki, *Kokumin Engeki no Tenbô*21; Watanabe, *Takarazuka* Kageki, 49.

[19] Watanabe, *Nihon-Bunka*,184-189; Shinji Ueda, *Takarazuka, Waga Takarazuka* (Tokyo: Hakusuisha, 1997), 44-46.

[20] Yoshitsugu Ueda, *Takarazuka Ongaku Gakkô* (Osaka: Yomiuri-Life, 1976), 55; Leonie Stickland, *Gender Gymnastics* (Tokyo: Trans Pacific, 2008), 52-69.

supreme goals of any enlightened society in late-modern era –, *Rurouni Kenshin*'s characters and the ideals they represent, believe in and fight for metamorphose into tangible goals for average participants in the audiences, compounded by specific elements included in Takarazuka Revue as a geopolitical and historical appearance.

Simultaneously, the sense of futility and emotional frugality conveyed by the performance *Rurouni Kenshin*, which was one of the most successful performance of Takarazuka Revue's recent history, running with closed ticket houses since the first day of the ticket-pre-sale, is magnified by the austere stage design, in striking contrast with other typical Takarazuka Revue performances. The main message of the performance in condensed in Himura Kenshin's second title-song, 「微笑みを交わし

て」 *Hohoemi wo kawashite* "Smile at each other", which describes most intensively and concisely those fleeting moments of togetherness and acceptance, and thus aligns to similar ardent efforts within the larger Japanese entertainment industry and media landscape of recent years. In doing so, the cathartic experience of the live performance is backed by a specific social-political agenda reinforced by aesthetic-ideological patterns reminiscent of the Japanese establishment, and slowly but decisively complying with the prevalent ideologies of the *wakon wasai* ("Japanese spirit, Japanese technology") policies openly promoted by the Abe administration during the 2010s: a reinvigoration of modernity and humanity as a tender, soft endeavour, characterized by a more compassionate, more profound communication and interaction between human actors both within the same society and among different societies.[21] *Rurouni Kenshin*'s second title-song sums up the main characteristics of Japanese late-modernity, and the pragmatic way in which it strives to move forward from being an importer of cultural assets to becoming an exporter of those very cultural assets it had originally imported, after having carefully japanised them: within the *wakon yôsai* strategy implemented during the Meiji period, by mid-1860s and originating in the premodern *wakon kansai*,[22] there are carefully preserved elements, until present-day Japan, which make Japanese culture both fascinating and slightly out-of-reach: the song represents one of many critical statements at the ideological climax of a long history of transforming the external inputs into national cultural assets, which would subsequently turn into economic and political power. It brings home, "domesticates" for both Japanese audiences – and non-Japanese scholars – the ineffability of classical Japan, while subliminally questioning traditionally transmitted forms of thinking and artistic expression: at the very least, catharsis is replaced by atmosphere and slow emotions, by the self-aware immergence into the frugality of life without expectations of moral teachings or profound messages.[23]

Possibly the strongest impact the *Rurouni Kenshin* phenomenon might have on audiences Japan-wide and around the world is the re-consideration of emotions, one's own and those of others, through the critical lens of mass-media.[24] Despite allegations of child pornography against *Rurouni Kenshin*'s initial manga author Watsuki Nobuhiro 和月 伸宏 (real name Nishiwaki Nobuhiro 西脇 伸宏, born 1970), released publicly in November 2017 and resolved with a fine of 200.000 JPY in February 2018, the tremendous popularity of the *Rurouni Kenshin* franchise lasts until present moment and continues to inspire hundreds of thousands of consumers of Japanese popular culture worldwide: on the one hand, both Japanese and non-Japanese fans seem to find in the manga and particularly animation versions of *Rurouni Kenshin* a balanced harmonization of the centuries-old and tension-loaded concept of *giri-ninjô*: the former assassin chooses to employ his skills (his old *giri*, the obligation to submit to his codex of honour) in the service of the community and of the ordinary people (*ninjô* – his own emotions and his own sense of justice), motivated by a deep sense of the futility of life (*mono no aware* もののあわれ, usually translated as "the pathos of things" and

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[21] David Leheny, *Empire of Hope* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2018), 94-98; Naoki Sakai, *The End of Pax Americana* (Durham: Duke University, 2022), 151.

[22] *Wakon kansai* ("Japanese spirit/roots, Chinese technology/knowledge") refers to the long centuries in which China had served as to Japan the main source of information and instruction. McClain, *Japan*, 202; Mason and Caiger, *A History of Japan*, 131.

[23] Gernot Böhme, *Aisthetik: Vorlesungen über Ästhetik als allgemeine Wahrnehmungslehre* (München: Wilhelm Fink, 2001), 24-28; Hiroki Azuma, *Fukashina Mono no Sekai* (Tokyo: Asahi Shinbun, 2000), 142; Kaiichirô Morikawa, *Shuto no Tanjô: Moeru Toshi Akihabara* (Tokyo: Gentôsha, 2003), 53.

[24] See Stjepan G. Mestrovic, *Postemotional Society* (London: Sage, 1997), 173.

referring to the fact that the beauty of everything that exists resides in its very transience)[25] and the impossibility of a quick retribution, and decides for a slow repentance instead of a fast death, as the old samurai codex would require. On the other hand, in the live-action movies and in the multidimensional, highly ambivalent version of Takarazuka Revue, *Rurouni Kenshin* provides the self-awareness of its position within the historical continuum as an embedded element which facilitates a sense of expansion beyond the limitations of the theatrical medium, highlighting the idea that overcoming outdated boundaries is possible: change must happen from within the system and change resides in the individual, who can transcend time and space in his/her quest for new horizons. Particularly the syncretic medium of the musical theatre, regarded both as a historical institution and a symbol of Japan, compounds *Rurouni Kenshin*'s significance: the impact, significance, influence of the live representation emerges as a new form of Soft Power, threatening to discomfort and finally to disrupt traditionally confirmed concepts of identity, self and culture.[26] Superficially conventional and stylistically eclectic, ideologically confusing and aesthetically challenging, naïve, cool and charismatic, *Rurouni Kenshin*'s representation of identity and the re-making of Japan in Takarazuka Revue's version transforms the franchise into a messenger of love and tenderness, at the core of the complicated network of politically staged nostalgia and economically reinforced loneliness, in a future world order in which the principles of cooperation and integrity, loyalty and respect would govern, as gate-keepers towards a paradigm of humanity with love, caring and compassion as driving forces.

Challenging the flow: *The Sun in the Last Days of the Shogunate* (2017)

For compassion to emerge and thrive, it needs the authority of public representation and open confirmation. It also needs the additional lessons in vulnerability – that is, that colossal sense of liberation and empowerment which come from acknowledging and accepting oneself in one's own fragility and ephemerality, flaws and discontinuities included. The snow troupe's lighthearted comedy *The Sun in the Last Days of the Shogunate* provides precisely the performative validation of this worldview. Staged at Takarazuka Grand Theatre from 21. April 2017 until 29. May 2017 and at Tokyo Takarazuka Theatre from 16. June 2017 until 23. July 2017 under the direction of Koyanagi Naoko 小柳奈穂子, *The Sun in the Last Days of the Shogunate* finds the same Sagiri Seina and Sakihi Miyu in their last performance before retirement (さよなら公演 *sayonara kôen* or "farewell performance") as the penniless townsman Saheiji and the courtesan O-Some, respectively. It appears at the other end of the dramaturgic spectrum in relation to *Rurouni Kenshin*, with self-irony and temporal displacement serving as tactics to bypass censorship and to crack open the gates toward a paradigm of masculinity able to counterpoint the almighty hegemonic gender architecture embodied by the stringent symbol of the samurai. *The Sun in the Last Days of the Shogunate* employs the background of the typical "hotel narrative" in 1862's Edo: namely, a variety of people living under the same roof with intertwining lives. The members of the samurai class, fallen into disgrace and poverty but still aware of their position above regular urban people, plan with implacable seriousness their futile strikes against foreign invasions while cohabitating vividly with prostitutes and various outcasts, in a colourful display of a representative segment of the Japanese society – in those days, ever since and nowadays. As exclusionist as the clan samurai might strive to present themselves, they are freeloading, unable to pay for their expenses, and reveal their indelible humanness in the ridiculousness of their arrogance and of their clinginess to bygone glory.

In *Rurouni Kenshin*, Himura Kenshin's incredible strength resulted from in his ability to switch back-and-forth from his identity as an assassin, mercilessly fighting for ideals he does not really understand, but which provide him with coherent narratives vital to his individual inner cohesion, to a less unified version of himself yet more deeply connected to his core of kindness, compassion and love. In his re-construction process of who he really is and in the positive

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[25] Donald Keene, *Seeds in the Heart* (New York: Henry Holt, 1993), 12-18; G. B. Sansom, *Japan: A Short Cultural History* (London: Cresset, 1931), 92.

[26] Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), 101-104; Eiji Ôtsuka, *'Otaku' no Seishinshi: 1980 Nendairon* (Tokyo: Kôdansha, 2004), 142-155; Pierre Bourdieu, *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action*. Translated by Randal Johnson & al.. (Stanford: Stanford University, 1998), 74; Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 36; Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity*, 127.

confirmation coming from those around him, Himura Kenshin discovers the beauty of acceptance as well as that sense of gratitude towards life as a continuous journey. Conversely, the samurai in *The Sun in the Last Days of the Shogunate* are unable to fend for themselves and instead display more accurately the characteristics which have been attributed to them by more recent research based on newly discovered documents: the members of the samurai class had not been the soft-spoken, mild-mannered intellectuals committed to such superior values as loyalty, honour, compassion. Rather, they were often corrupt, lazy aggressors living off the farmers' hard-work, poverty, crushing taxes; they did not join the new order and economic-political organization of the country out of sudden decency, idealism or enthusiasm for modern values, but out of sheer pragmatism, as most of them clearly understood that clinging on to the past would only mean their own demise, financial ruin, misery.[27] Furthermore, only approximately 6% of the former samurai participated in the various riots, as most of the members of this social stratum were ready and self-confident enough to face and solve the responsibilities and challenges brought about by modernity. *The Sun in the Last Days of the Shogunate*'s warriors are caricatures of a past which has never existed as such, despising, cursing, belittling, gaslighting, abusing those they deem inferior while at the same time taking for granted their efforts and mercilessly exploiting their naivete, kindness, lack of education.

In displaying this unveiled version of the samurai ideology in *The Sun in the Last Days of the Shogunate*, Takarazuka Revue challenges the prior orientalist-occidentalist polarization promoted by Japanese ideologues and concretized either in idealization or demonization of, and/or in contempt towards the others. The new type of historical referentiality outlined by Takarazuka Revue transcends the cliché of the perfect past lost in the waves of modernization, and instead openly outlines a type of historicity which allows for uncertainties and ambivalences and thus for the very vulnerable humanness of those times to emerge.[28] This, in turn, allows audiences to empathize with those deemed "different" or "other" – be it temporal or spatial "different" or "other" –, to understand them and to learn to accept them in their fundamental alterity or "radical otherness," as Emmanuel Levinas[29] famously put it, and to love them despite – or precisely due to – their flaws and inconsistencies. Aware of the increasing division occurring within a population which famously regarded and perceived itself as a homogeneous entity, Takarazuka Revue's administrators draw on what Nitobe had distinctively stated in his *Bushido: The Soul of Japan*: "Bushido was, and still is, the animating spirit, the motor force of our country". [30] Simultaneously, they compensate the stillness, contemplation, emotionlessness viscerally associated with the image of the samurai with innuendoes of emotional vulnerability, confusion, and despair decisively more in tune with the tumultuous times the world – including Japan – has been experiencing in the new millennium. The slender, fragile stature of *otokoyaku* does not mirror anymore solely the instability and ambiguity of Japanese modernity as a reputed monolith of uniqueness and purity, but challenges the samurai's assigned position as the self-conscious icon of Japan and gradually turns from a unique synthesis of Japanese spirit and Western knowledge/technology into a messenger of change and hope. [31] In the all-too fluid identity representations of the samurai characters since 2015, a sense of acknowledging the existence of a greater whole than the national limited geography becomes palpable, with perfectionism questioned in light of the necessity of the many others who share historical avenues with Japan on planet Earth.

Nonsensical sacrifice: *When the Last Sword Is Drawn* (2019)

The climax to this process of revealing the absurd conflict inherent to the *giri-ninjô* dialectics dominating the stature of the samurai appears in 2019's *When the Last Sword Is Drawn*: staged at Takarazuka Grand Theatre from 31. May 2019 until 8. July 2019 and at Tokyo Takarazuka Theatre from 26. July 2019 until 1. September 2019 under Ishida Masaya's 石田昌也 direction, it employs topstar-*otokoyaku* Nozomi Fûtô 望海 風斗 and topstar-*musumeyaku* Maaya Kiho 真彩 希帆 as the

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[27] Oleg Benesch, *Inventing the Way of the Samurai* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2014), 32-37; Wolfgang Schwentker, *Die Samurai* (Frankfurt-am-Main: C.H. Beck, 2003), 112.

[28] Fumihiko Gomi, *Bushi no Jidai* (Tokyo: Kôdansha, 2000), 91; Bell Hooks, *The Will to Change* (New York: Washington Square, 2004), 43-45.

[29] Emmanuel Levinas, *Altérité et transcendence* (Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1995), 92.

[30] Inazô Nitobe, *Bushido: The Soul of Japan* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, [1899] 2002), 71.

[31] Kawasaki, *Takarazuka, Shôhi Shakai no Supekutakuru*, 32; Kawasaki, *Takarazuka to iu Yûtopia*, 97.

main characters Yoshimura Kan'ichirô and his wife Shizu. Yoshimura is a low-class samurai from the northern island of Hokkaidô, born the son of a foot soldier in the service of the Nanbu clan, the lords of Morioka Domain in northern Japan, who cannot support his young family – despite being a master of both the martial and scholarly ways, being greatly skilled in the Hokushin Ittô-ryû school of swordsmanship, a brilliant scholar, a teacher of fencing, and a deputy instructor at the Nambu clan school – and decides to move southwards to Kyoto, where he can earn good money by joining the *shinsengumi* 新選組, the special secret police force organized by the military government (幕府 *bakufu*) in 1863. In the meantime, his wife Shizu longingly waits for his return while depending on the money he sends back home regularly while being confronted, both herself and her two young children, with the villagers' disdain and discrimination. Torn between the love for his wife and the vow of loyalty towards his superiors (first the Nanbu clan and then the *shinsengumi*), Yoshimura overtly embodies the impossible choices men had to face in premodern Japan and to a certain degree are compelled to face in modern times, thus irrevocably bursting the myth of emotionless perfection and mental toughness long promoted by scholars, literature, mass-media.[32] Moreover, his untimely death showcases beyond any ambiguity the impossibility to return to those times regardless of what hardcore conservatives in present-day Japan might claim. Rather than being the way of the warrior, this play shows how *bushidô* turns out to be, and to have been since its inception, an existential *cul-de-sac*.

Performed at a key-moment in Japan's recent history – the abdication of the Heisei emperor Akihito and the beginning of a new era, Reiwa period, under the ruling of his eldest son Naruhito took place on 1. May 2019, an event which had not happened since 1817 –,[33] *When the Last Sword Is Drawn* challenges the nostalgic revisionism prevalent in mainstream media with their open display of premodern glory and limitless grandeur. In line with the invention of traditions, Japan's past is repeatedly revised in Takarazuka Revue in parallel with global developments while at the same time reflecting – and discretely influencing – younger generations' expectations, longings, and fears.[34] More dramatically than in previous performances which similarly focused on the ways in which Edo period had been assiduously reconstructed since the Meiji Restauration (1868) as a half-mythical era during which the secluded nation had lived peacefully for roughly 265 years and had created a solid social structure with powerful networks of cooperation, support, and innovation, compounded by a healthy sense of "us, Japanese",[35] *When the Last Sword Is Drawn* precisely outlines the moral corruption and lack of ethical standards as well as the despicable in-fighting for power, resources (mostly financial) and sexual advantages among those who were, in fact, supposed to serve as the social pillars of the nation: the warriors or the samurai class. The main character Yoshimura Kan'ichirô's straightforward criminal activities under the unforgiving Neo-Confucianist rules of unconditional obedience to superiors, which turn him, eventually, virtually, into an assassin controlled by the *shinsengumi* and its corrupt leaders, and his pathetic death ordered by Ono Jiroemon, Kan'ichirô's childhood friend who had also been born to a foot soldier family, but had been adopted by the powerful Ono family and had become a high-ranking retainer, an *otakachi* 御高知, of Morioka Domain, and who had initially attempted to dissuade him from leaving his village by explaining what a terrible crime it is to break away from the feudal domain to which one is bound, but impressed by Kan'ichirô's determination had ultimately helped him travel southwards by handing him travel

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[32] See Robert W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Cambridge/Malden: Polity, 2005), 19-26; Tomoko Hidaka, *Salaryman Masculinity* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2010), 55-63; Lewis Howes, *The Mask of Masculinity* (Emmaus, PA: Rodale, 2017), 22-25; Hikari Hori, *Promiscuous Media* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2018), 64-69.

[33] The last abdication in the history of Japan took place in 1817, when Morohito 師仁 (23. September 1771-11. December 1840), posthumously honored as Emperor Kôkaku 光格天皇, 119th emperor of Japan according to the traditional order of succession, who had reigned since 1779, abdicated in favor of his son, Ayahito 惠仁 (16. March 1800-21. February 1846, posthumously honored as Emperor Ninkô 仁孝天皇. After his abdication, Emperor Kôkaku ruled as Daijô Tennô 太上天皇 ("Abdicated Emperor", also known as a *Jôkô* 上皇) until his death in 1840. Mason and Caiger, *A History of Japan*, 157.

[34] See Eric Hobsbawm, "Inventing Traditions" in *The Invention of Traditions*, eds. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2003), 12; Manuel Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture II: The Power of Identity* (Oxford/Malden: Blackwell, 1997), 327.

[35] Tadashi Uchino, *Crucible Bodies* (Kolkata: Seagull, 2009), 35; Yamanashi, *A History of Takarazuka Revue since 1914*, 86.

permits, contradict widely spread narratives of the hegemonic masculinity of the samurai as the symbol of Japan's glorious premodernity.

While Edo period has been conceptualized after 1868 as the climax of Japaneseness – on the same level as the Heian period (794-1185) almost 900 years prior was considered the golden age in Japan's history – before Western nations forced its opening to the world starting with 1853 and consequently inaugurated the hybridization of Japan, the figure of the samurai, recaptured in often rebellious celebrities such as Sakamoto Ryôma 坂本龍馬 (1836–1867) and Shirasu Jirô 白洲次郎 (1902–1985), almost instantly metamorphosed into a symbol of ideological resistance preserving in its synthetic stature an entire world of beliefs, yearnings, and self-fashioned idiosyncrasies.[36] The young nation-state was subsequently patterned upon Western models and its population carried out the import and implementation of Western fundamental assets of modernity such as knowledge, technology, and lifestyle in record-speed. However, with the import of new systems, new rules and regulations emerged and the social order as well as structure was deeply shaken, without a major overhaul of the fundamental values of the previous era.[37] In this train of thoughts, Takarazuka Revue's reconfiguration of the symbol embodied by the samurai had to happen under the sign of a rediscovered curiosity for life embedded within the direct confrontation with death, so that the disintegration of the old world as materialized by the *bushidô* ethics arises as a necessary condition for the emergence of a new world, organically integrated in the flux of history. Yoshimura Kan'ichirô's destiny, absurd in its implacability, tragic in its intransigence, turns into a symbol of Japanese intellectuals' reconstruction of its past – both absurd and tragic – without consideration for historical realities; its discursive as well as performative deconstruction occurs at the very core of the system which enabled the nefarious distortion of history: therefore, individual excellence rather than blind obedience, and courage rather than unconditional loyalty compounded by the vulnerability encompassed in a deep-rooted love for life and all beings, defines the new masculinity enacted by the samurai of early 21st century in Takarazuka Revue's performances, in line with Howes (2017) and Kimmel (2012),[38] who identify vulnerability as a core element of the new masculinity in relation to Western masculinity. In turn, this new type of masculinity delineates the representation of the healthy nation-state of late modernity and of the future, with love, compassion and mutual respect at its fundamental features.

"A bit silly and a bit funny": *Yumesuke's Dream: Senryô Souvenir* **(2022)**

In the process of rewriting the past, historical hierarchization happens almost automatically and results from the inevitable tendency, when confronting two – or more – eras by means of mediatic representation, to compare and draw educational lessons, delivered as existential messages to consumers, be it readerships or audiences.[39] One pivotal shift Takarazuka Revue's administrators operated when reconfiguring Edo period by means of the masculinity embodied in the samurai's ideological construction was to focus on the human being rather than the symbol: the trainer-turned-disciple who acquires valuable skills and eventually finds a fresh life purpose or the privileged son who learns existential lessons and thus humbles himself towards those less fortunate are common *topoi*, transforming performances into huge parables on humility and respect as pragmatic choices. *Yumesuke's Dream: Senryô Souvenir*, staged at Takarazuka Grand Theatre from 19. March 2022 until 18. April 2022 until and at Tokyo Takarazuka Theatre from 11. May 2022 until 12. June 2022 with Ayakaze Sakina 彩風 咲奈 as Yumesuke and Asazuki Kiwa 朝月 希和 as Oranda Ogin in the lead-roles, is such a "period drama": it depicts the daily activities and adventures of Yumesuke, the son of

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[36] Hori, *Promiscuous Media*, 53-58.

[37] Masakazu Iwata, *Ôkubo Toshimichi: The Bismarck of Japan* (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California, 1964). , 129-143; Marius Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2000), 133-134; Colin Jaundrill, *Samurai to Soldier: Remaking Military Service in Nineteenth-Century Japan* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 2016), 92-101.

[38] There is no proof of correlation and/or causality between the two instances (Western theoreticians and Japanese practitioners) apart from the temporal parallelism of the past five to ten years, but surely Takarazuka Revue administrators are aware of Western scholarship on masculinity and import it to Japan as they have been pursuing this strategy in various areas since 1914. Howes, *The Mask of Masculinity*; Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2012); Kimmel, Michael, *Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era* (New York: Nation Books, 2015).

[39] Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London/New York: Verso, 1998), 96-101.

village headman Odawara, a young, kind-hearted, inexperienced young man who has developed strong swordsmanship skills but hates fighting, and who is told by his father to practice *dôraku* 道楽 (a way of achieving enlightenment in Japanese Buddhism) by being a plain commuter and traveling to Edo with a thousand *ryô* – a slightly Japanised version of the hero's journey from Western literature.[40] Along the way, Yumesuke is targeted by a female pickpocket named Oranda O-Gin, who falls in love at first sight with him, touched by his direct, bottomless kindness. They move in together and begin a rather strange life in Edo: even though Oranda O-Gin strives to become a good wife suitable for Yumesuke, she cannot suppress her fiery temper which brings her repeatedly in trouble, both publicly and domestically. Yumesuke solves the various quotidian problems of Edo people with "money and kindness", and brings about different reactions in those he helps out. Eventually, the fact that each person is different and unique in his/her own way is the lesson towards enlightenment which Yumesuke earns, and which allows him to accept that gentleness is just one way or relating to the world and that other people have their own manners of living – all of them equally valuable.

In *Yumesuke's Dream: Senryô Souvenir*, the epic battle scenes come in close alternation with gestures of deep communication and emotional communion, coordinately reflecting closely long hours of intense training in the preparation of their characters' credibility, with actresses delivering time and again touching, soft, and inconspicuous confirmation aggregates of their work ethics and professional discipline.[41] This alternation serves to the imaginary integration of the traditional image of the samurai into the present-day Japanese society while conferring historical accuracy to individual gestures and collective interactions and contextualizing the subtext: when in doubt, choose life – a shocking lesson delivered by the representatives of the samurai characters when confronted with the larger worldview and when projected on the background of the late global modernity.[42] The insight on the supreme value of life clashes against the re-imagined codex of honour and loyalty which, more often than not, resulted in sadistic ceremonies and ritualistic suicides imposed upon the members of the samurai category in historical reality, blatantly against the individual's will (as aptly shown on-stage in *When the Last Sword Is Drawn*). Takarazuka Revue's *otokoyaku*'s samurai as orchestrated by its administrators, relies on demystifying the samurai's values as a deeply, strongly reinvented ideal in the shadow of its historical dissolution, while at the same time presenting it as a valid ideological structure to be remembered and acknowledged as such. Respect replaces loyalty and vulnerability replaces obedience. In the process, new layers of compassion and self-awareness emerge, which allow for universalism.[43] In Takarazuka Revue's *Yumesuke's Dream: Senryô Souvenir*, Japan's (in)famous exceptionalism seems to have lost its charm and *raison d'être*. What has started like a modest cultural import decades ago, the live musical theatre, turns gradually from a means to define and redefine modernity, masculinity, identity, Japanese and otherwise, into a paradigm of coping and cooperating with others in the universal vortex, even more intensely since mid-2010s. In doing so, Takarazuka Revue – its actresses, its administrators, and, last but not least, its faithful audiences – orchestrate(s) an impactful discourse on the redemptive power of love, of culture, of acceptance, while negotiating its position within the world community.

This is a powerful inspiration for Millennials and 1970-X-Gens (or *shinjinrui* 新人類 "new human breed" representatives, the Japanese correspondence to X generation in Japan), who find themselves increasingly at crossroads between self-preservation and communal or global concerns about potential – and sustainable – futures: in learning to deal openly with one's weak points, in acknowledging one's flaws, resides the strength to take responsibility and look for solutions instead of playing the victim of incontrollable circumstances. No one can control the starting point of one's life, but every person can start to decide at some point the direction in which to move during one's journey

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[40] *Ryô* 両 were gold coins and designated the gold currency unit in the *shakkanhô* 尺貫法 system in pre-Meiji Japan. Mason and Caiger, *A History of Japan*, 253.

[41] Ichizô Kobayashi, *Takarazuka Manpitsu* (Tokyo: Jitsugyô no Nihonsha, 1955), 22; Yoshitsugu Iwahori, *Isai Kobayashi Ichizô no Shôhô: Sono Taishô Shikô no Rejâ Keiei Shuhô* (Tokyo: Hyôgensha, 1972), 71; Meinhard Miegel, *Epochenwende: Gewinnt der Westen die Zukunft?* (Berlin: Ullstein, 2007), 11.

[42] Matthew Fuller and Andrew Goffey, *Evil Media* (Cambridge/London: MIT, 2012), 153; Robert Greene, *The Laws of Human Nature* (London: Profile Books, 2018), 490.

[43] Maki Fukasawa, *Sôshoku Danshi Sedai: Heisei Danshi Zukan* (Tokyo: Kôbun-sha, 2009), 92-98; Julia Kristeva, *La Révolution du langage poétique* (Paris: Seuil, 1974), 389-393.

in the world, and do his/her best to make it a story full of beneficial experiences, lessons, and memories. The pathetic fatalism of Japanese intellectuals with their dramatic tendency to focus on problems instead of solutions, is replaced in Yumesuke's metaphorical pilgrimage with practical examples on how to overcome hardships and be true to oneself, how to identify with honesty and straightforwardness one's weaknesses and limiting beliefs and how to turn them into powerful tools to move forward in life, how to learn to give love and accept love in return – all of them important lessons in maturity and the courage to graduate necessary rites-of-passages.[44] To the late-modern dissolution of the grand narratives of abstract personality and multi-layered individuality, *Yumesuke's Dream: Senryô Souvenir*, a product of popular culture promoted by Takarazuka Revue as the major outlet of Japanese mainstream media over 110 years of interactive negotiation and creation between creators and consumers, responds with pragmatic solutions, highlighting the urgency for empathy and integrity, reunited in the capacity to feel – and to show – compassion. It is a practical textbook in the course of "Humanity 2.0", when emotions are not only re-invented, but also taught as mandatory disciplines.

Conclusion: dissolving the past, accelerating the future

Among Takarazuka Revue's currently five performing troupes, due to its associated image of Japanese splendour and performative conservatism, snow troupe proved to be the most suitable in initiating the dismantling of Edo period's prevailing image and its all-encompassing symbolism overwhelming Japan's premodernity with wide repercussions until today: 2015's *The Night When the Stars Met* kickstarted the process of creatively but realistically reimagining the past and restructuring the ideology of the nation-state along the way, followed by *Rurouni Kenshin*'s dramatic yet relatable orchestration of historical upheavals on the backdrop of individual struggles towards self-acceptance, self-forgiveness and redemption. Conversely, in *The Sun in the Last Days of the Shogunate*, the comedic tone underscores the silliness of taking oneself too seriously in times of historical collapse and the importance of living in the present moment as the only alternative to denying the reality around oneself. Far more tragic in its inescapable fatalism, *When the Last Sword Is Drawn* lays out the impossible choices of those very individuals meant to embody Japan's almighty supremacy in premodernity: the members of the samurai class. Lastly, *Yumesuke's Dream: Senryô Souvenir* opens the pathway towards the perception and processing of Edo period as just another historical time, during which people lived and loved, worked and died, just in the same way humans have been doing everywhere, since time immemorial.

In parallel but with less substantial and correlated effect, after snow troupe's 2015 *The Night When the Stars Met*, all *jidaimono* performances staged by the remaining four troupes, eight as of the time of this writing (May 2024), focused on revealing various negative elements of Japan's premodernity while carefully providing existential lessons extracted from those very nefarious structures: its ferocious social inequalities as well as the thirst for power and blood of its leaders (*Nobunaga* on the life of the historical figure Oda Nobunaga [1534-1582], 2016; *Messiah* on the Shimabara Rebellion of 1637-1638, 2018, both flower troupe); its nonsensical, decadent urban culture (*Another World* with the same title in original Japanese, 2018, star troupe; *Genroku Baroque Rock* 『元禄バロックロック』, 2022, flower troupe; *Singing Lovebirds* 『鴛鴦歌合戦』, 2023, likewise flower troupe); its warriors' bizarre though outstanding fighting techniques in combination with the absurd *bushidô* ideology (*Unmatched in Dreams and Reality* 『夢現無双』, 2019, moon troupe; *The Yagyû Ninja Scrolls* 『柳生忍法帖』, 2021, star troupe). Simultaneously, the necessity for gradual change in overcoming Japan's insularity towards peaceful cooperation on a global level has been displayed, with roots in early Edo period historiography: *El Japón: The Samurai of España* 『El Japón：イスパニアのサムライ』, 2019-2020, cosmos troupe).

For more than 150 years, Edo period has been constructed as a one-time occurrence in the world history by Japanese politicians, mass-media, historians; it has served as a reference system to international potential anarchies due to its presumable uniqueness while delivering apparently reliable

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[44] Bell Hooks, *All About Love* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2000), 21-33; Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 51-72; Stephen Turnbull, *Samurai: The Story of Japan's Great Warriors* (London: Promotional Reprint, 2004), 74-77.

narratives of belonging, appropriation and progress. Starting with 2015, Takarazuka Revue Company endeavoured to challenge the prevalent discourses and assumptions, so that the present metamorphoses into an open book of limitlessly diverse outcomes and the future itself becomes the referential framework in a world increasingly interconnected, under the sign of healthy global interdependence.

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ARCADIAN MELANCHOLIA:
A CRITICAL VIEW ON BREXIT NOVELS OF THE ENGLISH COUNTRYSIDE

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Rezumat: Literatura Brexitului s-a dezvoltat până acum în trei direcții principale – ca satiră a vieții politice din Marea Britanie, ca distopie ce prevestește un Armageddon post-Brexit, ori ca evocare nostalgică a unei identități engleze trecute (și probabil pierdute). Studiul analizează această a treia direcție, aducând în discuție două romane post-referendum a căror acțiune se petrece la țară, *All among the Barley* al Melissei Harrison din 2018 și *The Lie of The Land* al Amandei Craig din 2017. Pornind de la ideea că dezvoltarea unui sentiment comun al națiunii se bazează pe recunoașterea unui trecut împărtășit de toți, studiul vorbește despre pastoralism și ruralitate ca teme romanești ce ajută cititorii să înțeleagă mai bine momentul prezent prin raportarea la asemănări și deosebiri între trecut și prezent și prin ajustarea sau consolidarea imaginii de sine a națiunii. Se arată că cele două romane îmbrățișează pe de-o parte atitudinea nostalgică prin adoptarea genului pastoral, dar, pe de-altă parte, sunt și critice față de ideea unei identități engleze esențializate, regăsibile numai în ruralul tradițional. Pastorala din cele două romane dobândește așadar o latură întunecată, în care predomină misterul și violența.

Abstract: The Brexit literature has so far taken three main directions – a satirical perception of political life in Britain, a dystopian projection of the post-Brexit Armageddon, and a nostalgic evocation of past (and presumably lost) Englishness. The current paper focuses on the third stance, discussing two post-referendum novels set in the English countryside, Melissa Harrison's 2018 *All among the Barley* and Amanda Craig's 2017 *The Lie of the Land*. Starting from the idea that building a sense of community of the nation relies on the acknowledgement of a shared past, the paper discusses these two novels about pastorality and English rurality as fiction that helps readers understand the contemporary moment by dwelling on similarities between past and present, and that adjusts or reinforces the nation's view of itself. The paper argues that these novels, while being, on the one hand, embodiments of this nostalgia, with their pastoral intake, are also critical of the yearning for an England that identifies with the traditional countryside. The two novels drive the narrative towards a darker side, with mystery and violence lurking.

Cuvinte-cheie: literatura Brexitului, identitatea engleză, națiunea, pastorala, viața la țară.

Keywords: Brexit literature, English countryside, Englishness, national identity, pastoral.

Introduction

In 2016, when British Prime Minister David Cameron called for the referendum about Britain's position inside or outside the European Union, the results indicated, among other things, that the constituent countries within the UK had diverging views on what nationhood is. Writers hurried to respond to the Brexit crisis, their novels, short stories and poems mirroring this new division, seeking explanations and speculating possible future scenarios. The questions surrounding nationhood in general and Englishness in particular were a priority for many of these writers, whose post-referendum works focus on the various crises that were brought about by Brexit. While the more obvious crises are the political and financial ones, a more insidious one is the identity crisis. The literary works not only capture the present moment, but are also concerned with the origins of this identity crisis, its historical and cultural causes and consequences. The two novels chosen in this study, Melissa Harrison's 2018 *All among the Barley* and Amanda Craig's 2017 *The Lie of the Land,* deal with the paradoxes of Englishness and the way individuals and communities relate to this identity

in two different historical periods that are full of political turmoil, the troubled 1930s and the uncertain Brexit years.

The Paradoxes of English Nationalism

The results of the Brexit referendum in 2016 indicated a series of symptoms, of which many are more worrying than the technical details of the separation from the European Union. The vast majority of Leave voters came from England, with a small majority from Wales, while Scotland and Northern Ireland chose in large numbers to Remain. In itself, this rising nationalism was not exceptional, given the international context in which bigger and smaller state nations have played the card of nationalist rhetoric for a new – or renewed – self-conceptualization. At the same time, it would be wrong to put the blame on English nationalism, as Englishness itself emerged in relation with Scottish, Welsh and Irish nationalisms, Jeremy Black points out[1]. More interestingly – and paradoxically – English nationalism turns out to be much more abstract that other nationalisms, inside or outside the UK. There is no English passport, parliament, or currency, Jeremy Black observes, which means that English nationalism lacks a concrete focus. At the same time, English nationalism is profiled mainly against itself: the British Empire, while not only English, is often perceived as synonymous with England, while "English" and "British" are also frequently regarded as interchangeable.

A second paradoxical aspect is explained by Fintan O'Toole[2], who starts from the motif of failure in the English national narrative, considered as a model of success and honour. From the charge of the Light Brigade to the retreat from Dunkirk, failure has been glorified in the historical discourse, a game that the successful and powerful empire could play, but is no longer afforded in the post-imperial age. Now, a failure is only a failure, O'Toole comments, with reference to the Brexit context. For Euroskeptics, the separation from the continent may have been considered a sort of a new (and unexpected) English revolution, given the appealing rhetoric of a Moment Zero in the nationalist narrative, but, again, O'Toole concludes, it was just another example of failure. Extrapolating from this example, O'Toole argues that English nationalism is an enigma, a notion in which two irreconcilable forces and tendencies are clashing: the local and the (overseas) imperial, even the imperial and the anti-imperial, centre and margin, domination and oppression. This "incoherence" generates both "a sense of superiority and a sense of grievance."[3] The Britannia that ruled the waves and made the first steps towards global culture is wary of the threat of dominance coming from the supranational entity which is the EU. As a result, this new, twenty-first-century, Brexit type of Englishness presents itself as both a victim and a model of exceptionalism.

English exceptionalism emerged – not on a local stage, as it is often the case with nationalisms – but on the global stage, as the British Empire gained overseas power and influence. The drawback, however, was that, in the process, England, being at the core of the imperial project, with Scotland, Wales and Ireland as mere semi-peripheries, felt little need, for a while, to fight for its own cultural distinctiveness. England and Englishness were, therefore, the exemplary exceptions that also served as models for the European foreign policy of the Empire, embodiments of the project of splendid isolation carried for at least a century and a half. In the post-imperial and, more recently, in the post-European age, the English project, in the form presented above, seems to have lost focus and relevance. At the same time, this perceived loss generated reactions of resistance or nostalgia, which triggered the narratives of Englishness to seek a reevaluation (or refashioning) of the past.

What past is this, in the constant search for a Year Zero? Looking at the public's preferences and the ensuing trends, a popular timeframe is the age before the Act of Union of 1707, that is, before the creation of Britain and British identity. As Sioban O'Connor[4] points out, recent years have witnessed a surge of interest in Tudor England, with novels, films, non-fictional books and documentaries that offer an insight into the private lives of kings, queens and the common people of early modern England. Commenting on the popularity of historical novels, for example the novels

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[1] Jeremy Black, *English Nationalism: A Short History* (London: Hurst, 2018).

[2] Fintan O'Toole, *Heroic Failure: Brexit and the Politics of Pain* (New York: Apollo, 2018).

[3] O'Toole, *Heroic Failure,* 3.

[4] Sioban O'Connor, "Brexit and the Tudor turn: Philippa Gregory's Narratives of National Grievance," in *The Road to Brexit: A Cultural Perspective on British Attitudes to Europe*, ed. Ina Haberman (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), 179.

written by Philippa Gregory, Sioban O'Connor notes: "the historical novelist writes the nation at a particular moment through a revisioning of its collective past and, in fictionalizing real-life events and people, helps to shape the contemporary moment by offering continuities between past and present which contributes to the nation's view of itself."[5] The England evoked in these texts is rural, pre-industrial, self-sufficient, relying on natural resources, with unspoilt landscapes and traditions. Such narratives are characterized by an "aggrieved yearning"[6] for something that no longer exists, for cultural integrity – rather than progress –, for culture as a form of defending the nation against external aggressions.

But this tendency is, in fact, only incidentally connected in a specific way with the reign of the Tudors. It makes sense to accept that the early modern period was a milestone in English history, with its last native English dynasty, one that was derived from common stock and therefore was deemed closer to the needs, tastes and views of the ordinary people than the feudal elites of the previous centuries. The desire to look back in admiration and with melancholy at a past moment in history which is regarded as better, purer, and happier than the present is far too general to be related to the particularities of the Tudor family and life in England during that period. In fact, a trend that was simultaneous with the rise in interest for the Tudors is the revisionist historical account of the last Plantagenet monarch of England, Richard III. The Richard III Society[7], founded one hundred years ago, has been instrumental, especially in recent years, in the process of rehabilitating Richard of York, who was defeated on the battlefield by the Tudors and whose afterlife was painted in a negative light by the same Tudors, in order to justify the legitimacy of their own claim to the English throne. An important role in the rehabilitation of the Plantagenet king – who, in another historical account, is presented as one of the kings who "made England"[8] – was played by writer and amateur historian Philippa Langley, who conducted the search for Richard III's last burial place, in Leicester, based on contemporary accounts and chronicles. This process, which ended with the monarch's funeral in 2015, is accounted in her book about *The King's Grave*[9], which inspired the 2022 motion picture *The Lost King*[10].

The Rubble of Recognition

This type of historical narratives relies on the mechanism of building a community which shares an emotional understanding and vision of the past and of the nation. While such distant pasts are preferred by writers, more recent manifestations are also frequently embraced: the 1920s and 30s, with their economic and political crises, looked back nostalgically at the time before the Great War, the *belle epoque*, as a time of peace, prosperity and stability, and the survivors of World War II regretted the innocence and elegance of the interbellum – a fact that will be addressed in this study, in the analysis of one of the novels.

In accounting for this apparent paradox, Svetlana Boym identifies a cultural period different from postmodernity, which she calls off-modernism[11], a time that experiences both an attraction for novelty and an attachment to tradition. This is an age she metaphorically characterizes as "the rubble of recognition"[12], a feeling about the past which is comforting and reassuring but, at the same time, pernicious. In other words, "nostalgia might allow us to look back at modern history not solely searching for newness and technological progress but for unrealized possibilities, unpredictable turns and crossroads."[13] Nostalgia contains a fundamental ambivalence: it wants the unrepeatable to repeat itself and the ineffable to gain material form, because the object of nostalgia is "notoriously elusive." Nostalgics don't grieve for an actual place or time, but rather for one that has suffered a series of improvements at the juncture between personal and collective memory. Referring to the global epidemic of nostalgia that has become prevalent in cultures worldwide at the turn of the millennium,

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[5] O'Connor, "Brexit and the Tudor Turn", 180.

[6] O'Connor, "Brexit and the Tudor Turn", 180.

[7] https://richardiii.net/

[8] Dan Jones, *The Plantagenets: The Warrior Kings and Queens Who Made England* (London: Penguin, 2014).

[9] Philippa Langley and Michael Jones, *The King's Grave: The Discovery of Richard III's Lost Burial Place and the Clues It Holds* (New York: St. Martin's Press), 2013.

[10] *The Lost King*, dir. Stephen Frears, 2022.

[11] Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 17.

[12] Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 13.

[13] Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 14.

from Russia to the United States, Svetlana Boym writes: "The twentieth century began with a futuristic utopia and ended with nostalgia. Optimistic belief in the future was discarded like an outmoded spaceship sometime in the 1960s. Nostalgia itself has a utopian dimension, only it is no longer directed towards the future. Sometimes nostalgia is not directed towards the past either, but rather sideways. The nostalgic feels stifled within the conventional confines of time and space. The past has become much more unpredictable than the future."[14] And later she summarizes the social and psychological mechanisms of nostalgia in these terms: "Fantasies of the past determined by needs of the present have a direct impact on realities of the future."[15]

The fact that nostalgia follows the principles of a utopian scenario is very interesting for the purpose of the present study. The word "utopian" has been frequently used by both sides of the Brexit dispute, inside the UK and on the continent. Susan Bruce observes that the u-word is used as a weapon in the EU political discourse as well as by the British Euroskeptics and it acquires a pejorative connotation in both lines of argumentation[16]. Starting from a misinterpreted commentary made by the President of the European Council at that time, Donald Tusk, about the possibly illusory or "utopian" future of the EU, Susan Bruce reminisces the words of the most famous British Euroskeptic of previous decades, Margaret Thatcher. When she characterized the European project about which Britain showed its reservation as early as the 1980s, the Iron Lady warned that, in her opinion, there was nothing benevolent and altruistic in programmes of European integration, but they were a "grand utopian plan" that, as seen before in history, could be threatening for genuinely democratic traditions. Similarly, for her, the EU was a "classic utopian project", an intellectual experiment whose failure she predicted with certainty. "Only the scale of the final damage done is in doubt", the British Prime Minister concluded.[17]

But utopia was also evoked, in the aftermath of the Brexit referendum, by British politicians and intellectuals who found themselves on the Remain and on the Leave side of the dispute. Remainers criticized nationalist slogans and convictions like those used by the separatist UKIP, "take back control", as utopian. For them, the idea that a Britain outside the European project could rediscover its past glory and greatness and, in this way, consolidate national self-determination, was totally unrealistic. Leavers, continuing the Thatcherite diatribe, embraced the notion that a European federalist project was in contradiction with the idea of an independent state and that the democratic claims made by the EU were therefore paradoxical. For them, to dream about the European federation while striving to ensure the freedom and autonomy of each member state was a utopia (if not a hypocrisy). It is striking to observe how the federalist and the isolationist tendencies within the UK both regarded each other as utopian. This reinforces the characterization of English nationalism, provided above, as contradictory and confusing, relying on a recognition of Englishness as, on the one hand, exceptional, superior, domineering, and, on the other hand, living in the post-imperial fear of European dominance.

Fifty Quintessences of Englishness

The engagement of literature in issues related to the problematization of national identity started long before the Brexit referendum. An almost prophetic novel that deals with Englishness in the context of isolationist tendencies and scepticism to supranational projects was Julian Barnes' *England, England* from 1998[18]. The book imagines a dystopian future in which the "real" England is reduced to bankruptcy by a corporate project that promotes a false, artificial, tourist-friendly version of England, called England, England, as a theme park. In the novel, tycoon Sir Jack Pitman invests successfully in a commodified and digested version of the country, located on the Isle of Wight, which soon becomes so popular that the home country becomes impoverished and abandoned not only by foreign visitors, but by business and government as well. The declared aim of the England, England project is that of reinventing Englishness as an authentic entity, but, in fact, it only becomes successful when the real past is forgotten, altered, changed to fit better into the imagological clichés. This process is anticipated by the evocation of the protagonist's early childhood memory of doing a jigsaw

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[14] Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 12.
[15] Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 16.
[16] Susan Bruce, "Leaving Home: Europe and 'Utopia,'" *Studies in Arts and Humanities*, 5 (1), (2005): 129.
[17] Bruce, "Leaving Home", 131.
[18] Julian Barnes, *England, England* (London: Vintage, 1998).

puzzle of the map of the British Isles and forcing one of the pieces into the wrong place. In a similar way, the England, England theme park is working against the natural tendencies, forcing memory and fabricating a "great" past that is, in fact, only a figment of people's imagination. Ironically, the theme park hires an "Official Historian," whose actual job is not to protect history, but to provide an inaccurate version of it, that recycles myths, prejudices, overgeneralizations, with the aim of transforming it into a marketing strategy. Those who visit the theme park, where all attractions are within reach and adapted, receive a corrupted version of history, which successfully reinforces a biased vision of national identity. A line from the novel summarizes this mechanism of manipulation very well: "patriotism's eager bedfellow was ignorance, not knowledge."[19]

The sightseeing tour of England, England contains elements from a list of "quintessences" (characteristics, virtues, personalities, events, places) that Sir Jack's marketing team have collected in a survey conducted at a national and international level. The top 50 attractions include the royal family, famous football teams, dishes, fashion, pubs, the countryside, landscapes, and others. While the list attempts a selection that signals "authentic" English features, its very selectiveness poses a major problem. Firstly, since all "quintessences" are smaller scale replicas of the original (including the royal family, impersonated by better-looking actors), the theme park becomes a study in simulacrum rather than an exercise of authenticity. Secondly, the selection leads to the wrong impression that England is exclusively a place of elegance, prosperity, power, sophistication and exclusive education, or, in other words, a country with no ethnic, racial, social, cultural and economic diversity (and, in fact, with quite limited gender diversity, too). And thirdly, England, England is clearly built in opposition to the other constituent countries, as even "quintessences" featuring high in the poll are ruled out as being Scottish or Irish rather than English (an example is porridge, absent from the menus proposed by the Gastronomic Committee). Even if porridge is voted as "specific" and "authentic", more popular and better known internationally than "Lancashire hotpot" or "Cumberland sausages", its non-English associations are the cause of its removal from the list, for fear of contamination. Thus, England, England emerges as an artificial haven and shelter for a species which only becomes extinct after the sanctuary built to protect it gives it the final blow.

Barnes' novel showcases a process that several years later is explained by environmentalist and journalist Paul Kingsnorth[20] as an erosion of the "real" England, a country made of individuals who see their identity under threat by the big changes brought by globalization, corporate agendas and consumerism. According to Kingsnorth, this process of erosion is generated by three major forces: the alliance between big business and big government against local initiatives and local colour; the rise of the new urban class, who have stylized, non-traditional lifestyles; the English people's incapacity to talk about themselves, their culture and their problems. The logic is, if they cannot address what their culture is, it is unlikely these individuals, victimized by this new world order, will be able to talk about its loss. Saluting the local people, publicans, farmers, independent shop keepers, as those who fight for a sense of belonging, Kingsnorth draws his own list of "quintessences", professions, places and landscapes which are relevant for anyone's understanding of English character: waterways, orchards, sheep farms, village greens, the countryside in general. It is not a coincidence, as we shall see in what follows, that Brexit novels feature evocations of the countryside in the past and in the present, as loci of meditation about the state of the nation and about the condition of Englishness.

The State-of-the-Nation Novel in the Brexit Era

A typically British narrative has been, since the eighteenth century, the state-of-the-nation novel, one that provides a social panorama, often with a strong satirical component, that presents a realistic X-ray of "the way we live now", paraphrasing the title of the famous Victorian novel written by Anthony Trollope in 1875. As Patrick Parrinder[21] argues in his study about nation and the novel, the idea of the English nation has been shaped by the written works that blend history and myth, social observation and critique, the comfort of the local or the domestic and the longing for the

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[19] Barnes, *England, England*, 85.

[20] Paul Kingsnorth, *Real England: The Battle Against the Bland* (London: Granta Books, 2009).

[21] Patrick Parrinder, *Nation & Novel: The English Novel from Its Origins to the Present Day* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

vastness of the overseas empire, regional variation and the unifying specificities of the nation. This is a novel concerned with the fate of the English.

At the turn of the millennium, the genre was thought dead. But the Brexit phenomenon brought about a revival of the state-of-the-nation novel, more eager than ever, as a poll published by The Guardian in 2009 pointed out, to focus not on the interior lives of individuals, but on "what is happening in the world."[22] Robert Eaglestone, who edited the first collection of critical studies about Brexit literature, or BrexLit, observes that what most of these novels and short stories have in common is a gloomy, dark mood, whether they are dystopias, grotesque satires, or nostalgic evocations, and explains this preference as the result of the novel's duty to fulfil its role of "humanizing big questions and creating emotional and cultural landscapes, in metaphorically poking us all in the ribs and urging us to start thinking critically and becoming politically active-e again."[23] Eaglestone shows that Brexit is not only a political phenomenon, but, to a great extent, a cultural one, its effects being captured almost immediately by post-referendum novels. If the English novel has always addressed the idea of the nation, BrexLit could not fail to do so, even if most writers regard the issue one-sidedly. Despite the deeply polarized views on Brexit all novels depict, the majority indicate the authors' belonging to the Remainers' side. While this is obviously an asymmetry that may affect the objectivity and fairness of the Brexit debate and overall picture, let us remember that fiction is allowed – and expected – to play by different rules. Moreover, this is not entirely surprising, given that so many of the British intellectuals, even the mainstream ones, are liberal and this also indicates how the political map has been drawn by Brexit along some clear axes that were defined by geography, age, class, but also level of education, type of education and degree of gentrification or urbanization.

For John Self, writing for The Penguin, the state-of-the nation novel is a natural reaction to the political earthquake generated by Brexit, with novelists fulfilling their mission of seeking to shed light on a crucial dilemma: "Who […] is doing the necessary work of transforming the raw emotion of the most divisive political issue in a generation into words that can help us understand what has happened, and why, and what comes next?"[24] Self provides a survey of Brexit literature written after 2016, dividing it into several groups. There is, first, "the out-and-out dystopia", with novels presenting Brexit as a mere symptom of a widespread horror scenario – Sam Byers' *Perfidious Albion* of 2018 fits well in this category. Then, there are the novels that present the political reality of a divided world *sine ira et studio*, like Ali Smith's 2016 *Autumn*. And last but not least, there are the satirical novels, some blending criticism and benign humour, like one of the novels to be discussed in this study, Amanda Craig's 2017 *The Lie of the Land*, others being grotesque farces with an obvious intertextual connection, like Ian McEwan's 2019 novella *The Cockroach*.

"On either side the river lie long fields of barley and of rye"

This quote is inspired by the opening line of Alfred Lord Tennyson's famous nineteenth-century poem which evokes, in typical Victorian fashion, an English past that mixes Celtic legends and medieval English folklore, *The Lady of Shalott*, a woman who accepts her tragic and accursed fate with serene resignation. Melissa Harrison's novel *All among the Barley*[25] captures an England in which the idyllic, atemporal details of pastoral life meet a historical time that is no longer patient with humanity. The story is set in rural Suffolk in the 1930s, when the English countryside is starting to transform, the signs of the past being still visible, but with progress already marching in. The slow rhythms and the yet unspoilt natural landscapes in the traditional villages coincide with the innocence of the female protagonist, Edie Mather, a girl of fourteen, who is not yet ready to leave her childhood behind and step into the life of a mature woman, harsh and disenchanted, like the lives of her mother and older sister. At a certain moment, this still tranquil universe is stirred by the intervention of a London Bohemian, Constance FitzAllen, who, while being urban and emancipated to the bone, is more desperate than the villagers to safeguard all the old rural traditions, from food recipes, construction methods and working the land, to songs, legends and superstitions. Her presence disturbs

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[22] "1000 novels everyone must read. Introduction. State of the nation," *The Guardian,* 21 January, 2009.

[23] Robert Eaglestone, ed., *Brexit and Literature. Critical and Cultural Responses* (London: Routledge, 2018), 17.

[24] John Self, "How Brexit has reshaped The British Novel," Penguin Books, 30 January 2020, https://www.penguin.co.uk/

[25] Melissa Harrison, *All among the Barley* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019).

the status quo in more ways than one – the innocent Edie is pushed into adulthood by her new relationships and by the realization that prejudice and discrimination destabilize and undermine the very fabric of the community. There is a perfect symmetry between Edie's personal experience, which is transformative, and the metamorphoses that appear in the interhuman relations among the villagers, as the dark shadows of the world outside are closing in. While the villagers are preparing for harvest time in the summer of 1934, Europe is relentlessly heading towards the chaos and destruction of the war, fighting with the economic depression and developing a love-hate relationship with extremist political agendas.

As expected of a traditional community, in which the wind of change has never blown very hard, Edie's life seems predetermined. Her sister Mary is already married and has a baby, her brother Frank is going to inherit the family's farm and is courting a neighbouring farmer's daughter, ready to get married and take over from his father. Edie, while reluctant – because she likes reading books more than the hard physical work on the farm and her schoolteacher has always encouraged her to continue her education – is preparing for a similar life. There is a high degree of predictability in these patterns, set by the evocation of the rural universe where human life, like nature, is cyclical. It is interesting to note that, after Constance FitzAllen's arrival, this predictability extends from the lives of individuals to overall village life. Connie's declared mission in Suffolk is to record customs and lore which are on the verge of extinction because of technological progress, modern trade and urban influences. She is writing articles in London journals, under the generic title "Sketches from English Rural Life", which she later intends to collect in a book. These articles are meant as records of all the wonderful farming traditions and as a way to raise the urban readers' awareness about a precious legacy soon to drown in neglect and oblivion. This legacy is important not only as an anthropological exercise, but as a way to boost people's sense of belonging to a national identity. The author describes the villages as the most blissfully authentic examples of Englishness: "[everyone] hailed from such villages but lately, and rightly do they remain the repository of our national pride. Here beats the heart of our nation, hale and lusty: Englishmen and Englishwomen, living in harmony with the land."[26] In another episode of the Sketches, the author extolls the "wholesome food such as may be found on every English farm where butter is churned by hand, cheese is made, and bread is daily baked," in stark contrast with "devitalised factory foodstuffs and tawdry foreign goods."[27]

Connie admires everything that is old and typically English in the village, despite the impracticality of many such things: she urges Edie's mother to continue baking bread in her kitchen oven rather than buying it from the village even if it is time consuming and Mother longs to be able to put her little free time to more pleasant use (for example, visit her daughter in the near town or go to the cinema). Connie's plan to persuade villagers to move back into the old cob houses only because they are so picturesque fails because these buildings have "damp walls, no pump in the kitchen, just a shared well and a shared privy"[28] and even the poorest of people long for a minimum of comfort and decency. She also deplores the increasing use of tractors, although genuine farmers see them as a necessary improvement. John, one of the hands at Mather farm, exclaims angrily after hearing Connie's ideas: "Tradition be damned! It may be a […] diversion to people like you, but farming isn't some kind of a game."[29]

The best illustration of the contrast between a set of appearances Connie is trying to keep under the guise of her ethnographic respect for heritage and the essence, which is known only by those whose real, everyday lives are affected by the tradition-modernity binomial, is a dialogue between the would-be lovers, Edie and Alfie Rose. Out of a sense of loyalty for Connie, Edie tries to explain her interests in words borrowed from her Sketches, which sound artificial in a farmer daughter's mouth: "She wants to preserve our ancient way of life here in the village – England is the country, and the country is England, she says", "it's about reconnecting people in towns to the land, to their inheritance [as a nation]."[30] No wonder Alfie, a farmer's son, is not impressed by this speech. He asks why Connie would like to have them talk about the ancient ways when they are eager to discard

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[26] Harrison, *All among the Barley*, 162.

[27] Harrison, *All among the Barley*, 209.

[28] Harrison, *All among the Barley*, 82.

[29] Harrison, *All among the Barley*, 101.

[30] Harrison, *All among the Barley*, 91.

slow and hard labour like old clothes and replace it with something mechanized and shining new. The darkest side of these exalted attitudes is yet to be revealed: Connie persuades the true English villagers to affirm their Englishness by sabotaging negative foreign influences. Consequently, they start persecuting the local shop keeper and a family of vagrants who seek refuge in an abandoned house because they are Jews. The "purity of purpose" typical of rural life that Connie admires identifies its modus operandi in Anti-Semitism.

The novel also captures the notion that the melancholy vision of an idealized past is not related to a real, historical time and space, but relies on a mere abstraction and is, in Svetlana Boym's words, elusive, because almost each historical period feeds on a nostalgic perception of a previous moment. In *All among the Barley*, a good metaphor of this elusiveness is the description of the stately home that dominates the Suffolk countryside and the village of Elmbourne, Ixham Hall. Owned by the Lords Lyttleton since times immemorial, the Hall is, in the 30s when the novel takes place, only a shadow of its past glory. The villagers reminisce with grief how all was lost in the Great War, when, upon hearing the news that his son and heir had been killed at Ypres, the current lord had shot himself. Now, the Hall stood empty, haunted by the ghosts of the dead. It is depicted as an embodiment of the longing for the greatness of several different historical times, all instrumental in the process of building the English national identity: the private chapel of the Hall was built with stone taken from a long-gone Norman keep, the Hall itself hailed from Tudor times, catching the eye with its warm red brick façade, and grand harvest celebrations had been held on its lawn until the Great War.

We can recognize in the rhetoric of Connie's Sketches the mood that was characteristic of European political and cultural discourse in the interwar years. But, at the same time, we keep in mind that Melissa Harrison's book was written in the wake of the event that brought segregationist tendencies in the UK at a level similar to the extremism of the 1930s. The post-referendum campaigns and arguments deepened the divide that was already there in the British society and invented new polarities: Leavers vs. Remainers, England vs. Scotland and Ireland, rural vs urban, working-class vs intellectual, native vs migrant. Indeed, as one of the most fiery debates around Brexit indicated, the issue of free movement in return for free trade has been an important point in the list of "deals" Brexiteers were not willing to strike with the European Union in the Withdrawal Agreement[31]. In the British society, this issue is translated in the increased hostility towards immigrants, regarded as a major threat not only for the job market but also for the purity of the English race. Ali Smith, a Scottish writer who was among the first to publish a Brexit novel in 2016, *Autumn*[32], captures the absurdity of this new nationalist symptom in her book when a character sees an inscription on a migrants' house which reads "Go home" and the owner's prompt answer below is: "We are already home. Thank you." This is all the more surprising in a country that has taken great pride in its multinational composition and in the legacy of cultural tolerance left by the overseas empire.

Pastoral vs. the City

One of the most obvious characteristics of the pastoral genre, in its ancient as well as modern form, is the fact that its geography clearly separates the urban and the rural, civilization and nature. The pastoral operates with a set of specific features, such as the bucolic setting and the characters engaged in traditional professions, especially shepherding. Theorists of the pastoral genre have argued that the English interest in the pastoral as early as the Elizabethan period is symptomatic of an ecological sensibility that was rare in pre-industrial societies. Going even further, Jeffrey Theis, in his *Writing the Forest in Early Modern England: A Sylvan Pastoral Nation*[33], focuses on a different kind of pastoral setting, the forest, analysing it in the context of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when woodland was instrumental in the formation of English individual and national identity. His illustrations, predictably, include Shakespeare's romantic comedy *As You Like It*, where the pastoral landscape and mode rescues the characters from the artificiality and corruption of the court and helps them find true love and happiness. Theis connects the setting of the forest in such plays with what he

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[31] https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/relations-non-eu-countries/relations-united-kingdom/eu-uk-withdrawal-agreement_en
[32] Ali Smith, *Autumn: A Novel (Seasonal Quartet)* (New York: Pantheon, 2017).
[33] Jeffrey S. Theis, *Writing the Forest in Early Modern England: A Sylvan Pastoral Nation* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2009).

considers the early modern society's already growing concerns about deforestation, land ownership and the human relationship to nature. A more relevant instantiation of the forest as a cultural symbol, though, is the nod to the utopian conception of "merrie England", the idyllic medieval society that displayed features of essential Englishness, in a (relatively) peaceful perceived time, that led a healthy life in the open air, practising physical exercise as a favourite pastime, and championing egalitarianism, all virtues famously embodied by the English mythical hero *par excellence*, Robin Hood and his merry men.

Melissa Harrison's novel is a very convincing contemporary evocation of the pastoral, the author being considered by some reviewers a true nature writer, whose attention for lush detail gives the book an almost hypnotic character: "As an evocation of place and a lost way of life, Harrison's novel is astonishing, as potent and irresistible as a magic spell. […] [Edie] notices a grey sky 'stitched with wavering skeins of geese', the 'green beards' of the barley that give a field 'a soft nap, like dog's fur', the 'wet-glass squeak' of hunting bats. […] 'Corn poppies and cornflowers, dockweed, thistles, wild onion, mousetail, cleavers, shepherd's needle, charlock, rye brome and corn buttercup'".[34] The serenity of these evocations and the nostalgic tone are countered by a darker twist: there are also the wireworms that can destroy a whole year's crop, the summer gold flowers, so beautiful that they are sold in bunches at railways stations in the city, but bad for horses' legs, the witch marks left by ancestors in the old houses to ward off evil, and, of course, the worst evil of all, xenophobia, the rising fascism, the danger of the war.

Another post-referendum novel about a pastoral gone badly is Amanda Craig's *The Lie of the Land*[35]. Set in contemporary Britain, the book focuses on a couple fighting the confusion and wreck brought by the economic recession, which made both of them lose their jobs and therefore no longer afford owning a house in London and living in the big city, with their children in good private schools. The havoc of the political and financial crisis is affecting their relationship badly, but they cannot go through the costs of a divorce and separate lives. Lottie and Quentin leave the lights of the city and the beloved cosmopolitan milieu and move into an old and damp cottage in Devon. If this change affects the adults badly, for their children, this is a cataclysmic event. Xan, barely out of school, gets his Cambridge application rejected and his future plans seem to crumble as he finds the only available job at the assembly line in a pie factory. What's more, given his mixed racial background, Xan feels less welcome than the Polish immigrants who live in the village and work in the same factory, something he had never been aware of in multicultural London.

The shock of the change of scenery is more dramatic given that this countryside is less idyllic than the newcomers had promised themselves. On the one hand, Devon is neither Sussex (or other counties in the mild South of England), nor Cornwall (the neighbouring county which is more famous and favoured by tourists for its spectacular seascapes). On the other hand, the sleepy, isolated village, with only one shop and one pub, with narrow lanes and absolutely nothing to do in one's free time, is the fief of Euroskeptics and xenophobes, of ultra-conservatives and bullies. As one reviewer points out, "this is a novel about two very different sides of the nation, especially the forgotten people of the provinces often sneered at or sentimentalised by those living in cities."[36] Lottie and Quentin are, at the beginning of the story, privileged city dwellers, successful professionals (she is a talented architect, he is a famous journalist) who can afford a big house, good schools for the children, long holidays in exotic locations, or fashionable parties. They belong, as Lottie puts it, to the golden generation, the luckiest in British history, who had benefitted from student grants and reasonable prices on the real estate market. But now, "the way we live now" changes dramatically and the middle-class utopia turns into a bad dream. Moving to the countryside is a social and financial compromise they are compelled to make but, as they arrive in the far removed, dim and distant Devon, they realize that the countryside has its own hierarchies. Where they expect, stereotypically, elegant fox hunters and riders, manicured village greens, ancient but well-preserved pubs and cheery locals, Devon offers them nothing of the kind. The only job Quentin finds is a column about the hidden face of country life,

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[34] Clare Clark, "*All among the Barley* by Melissa Harrison review – Suffolk in the 1930s," *The Guardian*, 6 September 2018.

[35] Amanda Craig, *The Lie of the Land* (London: Abacus, 2018).

[36] Gerard Woodward, "*The Lie of the Land* by Amanda Craig review – the country idyll turned on its head," *The Guardian*, 17 June 2018.

where he writes about "the hell of living in mud, the aggression of rustic beams, the monotony of food without multiculturalism and the disappointment of trying to grow his own vegetables only to see them eaten by slugs."[37] The house they rent is decrepit, has poor plumbing and no central heating, and the only company they keep are people with "terrible teeth and terrible clothes."[38]

Interestingly, nostalgia's object in the novel is not the lost English countryside, but the lost London of Quentin's youth, an Arcadia of equal opportunities and open-mindedness: "Quentin loved London when it was dingy, when ordinary people like teachers and nurses had been able to live in nice parts of the city for a modest sum." It was a special kind of Britain, "more confident, more tolerant, more civilised, more enterprising and more beautiful than the rest of the country."[39] No wonder, then, that the Bredins feel completely estranged from the village they move in, as if it were a foreign country, with strange customs and mentalities. One of the small daughters asks her mother: "When are we going back to England?" and Lottie answers, a little unconvincingly: "This is England, too"[40], a line that, in the true spirit of a satire of middle-class manners, as a reviewer comments, "betray[s] so much about the prosperous insularity of their London existence."[41]

At the present moment however, the impoverished Quentin admits that London has turned into a cruel and cynical place: "All cities have this in common: they are wonderful if you have either youth or money, but horrible if you have neither."[42] And Lottie is soon surprised to find kindness behind the terrible teeth and the terrible clothes, so that, by the end of the book, when they can afford to return to the capital, they choose to remain in Shipcott. The wide city vs. country divide has been annulled. But this is not to say that the English village takes an idyllic shape, after all. If anything, at a closer look, it gets worse than the first impression of racists and bullies, sheep shit and bad transport connections. The house the Bredins rent hides the darkest secret of all – a headless corpse – and their local housekeeper is a tyrannical mother and a sociopathic serial killer. However, despite the whodunit plot set in the country, *The Lie of the Land* is not a cosy mystery in the style of Agatha Christie's Miss Marple series. The murders and disappearances do occur in a small community and the amateur sleuth who solves the cases is indeed a woman, but there are far too many taboos broken unequivocally in the story, from rape and incest, to mental insanity and abandoned babies, for it to be "cozy." This last illusion is also shattered by Craig in her readers.

Conclusion

Of all the genres embraced by Brexit literature, the pastoral turned on its head is the most complex, as it brings to the forefront the notion that Englishness is rooted in ineffable nostalgia, while criticizing this very pattern and urging readers to question the connection between the aggrieved yearning of the past and the shared sense of national identity. The Arcadian versions the analysed novels present are anything but perfect, and prove, as the dystopian critical literature frequently does, that any utopian scenario contains at least a small Orwellian seed. The pastoral genre and the historical narrative in Brexit prose make a point that is best summarized by one of the characters in Melissa Harrison's novel: "Mother never spoke of the past because even ill years turned rosy in the mind's eye and nostalgia was not something one should trust."[43]

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[37] Craig, *The Lie of the Land*, 77.
[38] Craig, *The Lie of the Land*, 55.
[39] Craig, *The Lie of the Land*, 75.
[40] Craig, *The Lie of the Land*, 52.
[41] Henry Hitchings, "*The Lie of the Land* by Amanda Craig – another country," *Financial Times*, 16 June 2017.
[42] Craig, *The Lie of the Land*, 76.
[43] Harrison, *All among the Barley*, 171.

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REPRESENTATIONS OF TRAUMA, TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION IN SOUTH AFRICAN FICTION

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Rezumat: Lucrarea analizează modul în care literatura sud-africană a fost influenţată de audierile şi rapoartele publicate de Comisia pentru Adevăr şi Reconciliere din Africa de Sud încă de la crearea acesteia în 1995. În acest sens, voi examina următoarele romane: *Arma din casă* (1997) de Nadine Gordimer, *Praf roşu* de Gillian Slovo (2000) şi *Dureri lunare* de Kopano Matlwa (2017) pentru a înţelege modul în care scriitoarele sud-africane reflectă asupra recuperării adevărului despre istoria violentă a ţării şi asupra reconcilierii cu traumele trecute şi prezente. Lucrarea se concentrează, de asemenea, asupra modului în care reprezentantele a trei generaţii diferite reprezintă trauma în romanele lor, în anumite momente din istoria post-apartheid şi postcolonială a Africii de Sud şi asupra modului în care procesul de reconciliere cu trecutul s-a schimbat în cei treizeci de ani de la abolirea legilor apartheid.

Abstract: The paper analyses how South African literature has been influenced by the hearings and reports released by the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) since its creation in 1995. In this respect, I examine Nadine Gordimer's *The House Gun* (1997), Gillian Slovo's *Red Dust* (2000) and Kopano Matlwa's *Period Pain* (2017) in order to understand the ways in which South African novelists reflect on the recovery of truth about the country's violent history and on the reconciliation with past and present traumas. In addition, the paper focuses on the portrayal of trauma in the novels of the representatives of three different generations of writers at certain moments in South Africa's post-Apartheid and postcolonial history, and on the practices within the process of reconciliation with the past since the abolition of Apartheid laws thirty years ago.

Cuvinte-cheie: adevăr, reconciliere, literatura sud-africană, traumă.

Keywords: reconciliation, South African literature, trauma, truth.

The post-Apartheid period in South Africa has been marked by significant changes as far as the political and literary scenes are concerned. Although the two aspects are not necessarily related, South African Apartheid literature was concerned with the devastating effects of that regime on the lives of South Africans, focusing on the two reactions produced by the injustice of Apartheid laws: numbness caused by the inability to change them or indignation and rebellion against them. South African novelists have adapted their writings to include themes and issues present in world literatures that were less used before 1991, such as migration, exile, feminism, gender identity and a redefinition of otherness. The past three decades have been marked by the two Nobel literature laureates, Nadine Gordimer and J M Coetzee and the rise of new genres, the most notable ones being detective fiction, science fiction and children's literature. However, the ties with the Apartheid period have not been cut off since numerous writers have chosen to include in their writings testimonies made public by the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), with characters who have to reconciliate with the traumatic past.

The novels I have chosen to discuss belong to different stages of the post-Apartheid and postcolonial period. The first is Nadine Gordimer's *The House Gun*, published in 1997, that uses the techniques employed by the TRC and the reports that were released in the newspapers shortly after the hearings of the commission had begun. Secondly, there is Gillian Slovo's *Red Dust,* published in 2000, structured around the techniques, the testimonies and the hearings of the TRC, as the novelist had access to the first official reports made available to the public in 1998. The third novel, Kopano Matlwa's *Period Pain (Evening Primrose),* published in 2016 emphasises the lingering effects of

Apartheid while exploring the trauma of a woman who addresses her insecurities to God. The aim of the study is to analyse how South African literature has been influenced by the reports released by the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) since its creation in 1995 and how trauma has been represented in literature after the atrocities were described in detail by the media.

The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission

The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) is widely recognized as one of the most debated initiatives that has played a significant role not only in the democratization process but also in the writing of the post-Apartheid and postcolonial South African literature. It is essential to understand how South African novelists reflect on the recovery of truth about the country's violent history and on the reconciliation with past and present traumas and how they integrate these new issues in their literary creations. Numerous observers of postcolonial literatures underline the fact that postcolonial literary works "create fictional life-worlds in which the ambivalence of colonial land and economic injustices are exposed as potentially mutating" and thus offering new perspectives for postcolonial writers.[1] As Irene Visser underlines, storytelling can become "a ritual means to heal from trauma because it connects past and present, drawing upon the ancestors and their sacred power to restore harmony and health."[2] In this respect, postcolonial fiction is a modality to narrate trauma with respect to truthfulness and trustworthiness.

The South African TRC was created in 1995 "to help heal the country and bring about a reconciliation of its people by uncovering the truth about human rights violations"[3] that took place in the second half of the 20th century. Its main aim was to collect evidence and bring to light memories and testimonies gathered from both victims and perpetrators. What was different from other such initiatives established around the world was the fact that its purpose was not to identify and prosecute individuals for past crimes, but to allow South Africans to tell their stories while granting amnesty, "constructing an impartial historical record of the past and drafting a reparations policy"[4]. The first volumes of the final report were released in 1998, and the remaining ones were made available to the public in 2003. Before establishing the rules to be followed by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the South African government required the opinions of its people alongside the point of view of the international community, human rights lawyers, religious communities, and, last but not least, victims regarding the issue of accountability and amnesty. Detailed testimonies were published about gross violations of human rights: torture, killings, disappearances, abductions, rape, to name just a few. Transparency was the main feature of the TRC, as both South Africans and the entire world became aware of the atrocities that had been committed during the Apartheid years and the racial discrimination enforced by governmental laws.

Nevertheless, the TRC was criticized for not insisting on "the effect and impact of apartheid's policies resulted in the need for the perpetrators, or the 'trigger-pullers', to bear the collective shame of the nation"[5] and not punish the leaders who made the Apartheid regime possible. Moreover, the recommendations of the TRC have not been implemented and there have been very few prosecutions of those who were refused amnesty. As James Gibson notes: "the truth and reconciliation process was certainly costly, in terms of both money and in the failure to produce retributive justice."[6] In addition, amnesty is regarded as being inconsistent with international law, although the South African TRC provided arguments to support the idea that it could be seen as a compromise in order to obtain accurate testimonies from perpetrators. South Africa's truth and reconciliation process is considered to be one of the most prominent examples of transitional justice processes. The TRC sought to provide a clear picture of the past, to promote reintegration and reconciliation, to establish a human rights

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[1] Oliver Nyambi, "Writing back to colonialism, again: The novel *The Chimurenga Protocol* and the 'new' resistance literary culture in post-2000 Zimbabwe," *Literator*, Vol 36, No. 1 (2015). https://doi.org/10.4102/lit.v36i1.1125. Last amendment 2015.

[2] Irene Visser, "Decolonizing Trauma Theory: Retrospect and Prospects." *Humanities*, vol 4, no.2, (2015): 251.

[3] Desmond Tutu, "Truth and Reconciliation Commission, South Africa". Last amendment 14 April, 2024. https://www.britannica.com/topic/Truth-and-Reconciliation-Commission-South-Africa/Challenges-and-limitations

[4] Tutu, "Truth and Reconciliation Commission, South Africa".

[5] Tutu, "Truth and Reconciliation Commission, South Africa".

[6] James Gibson, "The Contributions of Truth to Reconciliation: Lessons from South Africa", *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 50, No. 3, (2006): 410.

culture, as well as to facilitate a peaceful political transition. To achieve these goals, it adopted a restorative approach instead of a retributive one.[7]

Due to the fact that the South African TRC held public hearings and the media reported to the public instantly, the hearings influenced many South African literary writings of the period. Moreover, the new generation of writers brings forward past traumas, searching for truth and reconciliation. As Desmond Tutu notes in the final report of the TRC, the past is a "jigsaw puzzle" of which the TRC is only a piece and suggests that the search for "the clues that lead, endlessly, to a truth that will, in the very nature of things, never be fully revealed."[8] South African literature can be regarded as another piece of the jigsaw puzzle: "The stories of the TRC represent a ritualistic lifting of the veil and a validation of what was actually seen. They are an additional confirmation of the movement of our society from repression to expression. Where in the past the state attempted to compel the oppressed to deny the testimony of their own experience, today that experience is one of the essential conditions for the emergence of a new national consciousness. These stories may very well be some of the first steps in the rewriting of South African history on the basis of validated mass experience."[9]

Violence as a repetition impossible to break: *The House Gun*

In a 1998 interview, Nadine Gordimer states that the "digging up of the truth" is both extraordinary and painful. In her opinion, the main task of the TRC is to reveal "the complexity of human beings, the complexity of their reactions to different pressures on their personal lives and their political and working lives, and the constant shift in their morality."[10] She links stories of ordinary people and history itself in order to present her view of the transitory South Africa where violence has intricate patterns set by the former Apartheid laws and by the process of transition, which made guns become a legitimate way of solving problems. *The House Gun* is a response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's hearings as it explores the implications of the process of coming to terms with past and present violence and the mechanisms of recovery in the microcosm of a South African family. In this context, the role of post-Apartheid literature is to relate history with the present of the country, to prevent South Africans from forgetting the violent past while stimulating the process of reconciliation.

The House Gun presents the consequences of violence and the strong ties that it builds among people at a time when guns are "lying around in the living-room, like a house cat"[11]. The novel presents the main concerns of South Africans in the transition period from Apartheid to democracy: violence, guilt, confession, reconciliation, or punishment.

Harald and Claudia Lingard, the passively liberal white couple placed at the centre of the story do not consider that much has changed in the political transition to the post-Apartheid rule, from F.W. de Klerk to Nelson Mandela. Harald, a business executive, and Claudia, a doctor, live ordinary lives until the evening when they hear that "something terrible has happened"[12]. Their secure life in a small and comfortable house in the suburbs of Johannesburg is disturbed only when they watch the evening news reporting disasters elsewhere. The white middle-class family believes they have been shielded from violent intrusions until a friend brings an unexpected message. Their only son, Duncan, has been arrested for killing one of his housemates. He confesses to the crime, although his testimonies are not out of guilt. Yet, Harald and Claudia cannot understand what happened to Duncan's faith and to their personal teaching to him about the sanctity of human life.

The House Gun records the psychological transformations that Harald and Claudia undergo, as they search for the truth and an understanding of violence, for reconciliation with the trauma

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[7] Laura Mc Leod, "Reconciliation through Restorative Justice: Analyzing South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Process". (2015) https://www.beyondintractability.org/library/reconciliation-through-restorative-justice-analyzing-south-africas-truth-and-reconciliation

[8] Shane Graham, "The Truth Commission and Post-Apartheid Literature in South Africa", *Research in African Literatures* Vol. 34, No. 1 (2003): 11.

[9] Njabulo Ndebele, "Memory, Metaphor, and the Triumph of Narrative," in *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa* eds. Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetzee (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 20.

[10] Donald Paul, "A Conversation with Nadine Gordimer" (1998). http://www.worcesterphoenix.com/archive/books/98/01/02/THE_HOUSE_GUN_BAR.html Last amendment 2016.

[11] Nadine Gordimer. *The House Gun*. (London: Bloomsbury, 1998), 271.

[12] Gordimer, *The House Gun*, 3.

caused by their son's murdering one of his friends. The white couple is trying to come to terms with the murder in the same way the South African society attempts to reconcile with its violent past.

The novel is divided into two parts: the first part presents the reactions that Duncan's parents have when they are confronted with the news of their son being a murderer, whereas the second part provides access to Duncan's multiple identities, related to his relationships with the others. The various perspectives on Duncan's personality deconstruct the typical portrayal of a murderer and create a complex image of a troubled South African society. Although Duncan's crime is a crime of passion, it forces Harald and Claudia to confront reality and the legacy of Apartheid: South Africa's violent history has led to an increase in the households that keep a gun for self-defence.

The House Gun portrays the process of reconciliation in the relationships between the characters. The novel begins with the personal tragedy of the parents devastated by their son's act of murder and progresses to a transformation of their personal values and beliefs. Even though Gordimer's novel focuses on a violent act committed by a white person, this case could have been brought to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as it is a crime of passion committed by a young, privileged, middleclass man. Violence as a means of connecting the individual to the community, transforming personal trauma into a collective experience, is a central theme of Gordimer's novel. The issues of truth and reconciliation with the past are addressed within the microcosm of this middle-class white family, with reflections on the broader multicultural and multiracial society. The family, much like the South African nation, is put on trial and compelled to confront and reconcile with the truth that is revealed during the murder trial.

For both Harald and Claudia, something new has emerged "out of something terrible"[13] and they find a different way of living in the new South Africa, no longer safely secured in their own ignorance. The final words of the novel belong to Duncan, as his seven years in prison give him time to read Homer's *The Odyssey* and reflect on the idea of violence as a repetition. His conclusion is that: "I've had to find a way to bring life and death together"[14] .

It is impossible to imagine a community where there is no conflict among its members, or between its members and those living outside this imagined community. However, conflict does not necessarily transform into violence, and it may be divided into internal and external conflict. Cultural and psychological predispositions may determine the conflict level within a community, whereas economic and social parameters may set the targets of aggression within the same group of people or outside of it. The 1990s marked a tendency to isolate violence to less developed countries. Gordimer points out that state violence during Apartheid was "quotidian and rampant"; to be victims was "the way of life for black men, women, and children"; violence meant a "desperate devaluation of life"[15]. Degradation turns into violence and economic development may partially solve this problem.

In *The House Gun*, as in all her novels, Gordimer builds her scenario around an event outside the will of her characters that forces them to reconsider their life experiences. There is one line that is repeated through the entire novel: 'Something terrible happened', which reminds the readers of the disastrous event, and Harald and Claudia of the alienation from the majority of people who are not confronted with misfortune. The white couple experiences "a sense of kinship with those who have been disempowered"[16]. Private disaster produces private grief and mass media exposes crimes publicly so that the private becomes public. In turn, violence induces a form of equality and this is the reason why public exposure brings about a feeling of empathy. The microcosm of *The House Gun* captures the South African society.

The house gun itself must be "read in the light of this idea of communal or collective violence and communal responsibility: a culture of violence which filters down to the individual"[17]. The house gun is described by Duncan in his brief account of what had happened as being "always somewhere about"[18]. At Duncan's murder trial, the judge draws attention to the wider responsibility of a violent society: "the gun happened to be there … that is the tragedy of our present time, a tragedy repeated

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[13] Gordimer, *The House Gun*, 279.
[14] Gordimer, *The House Gun*, 294.
[15] Nadine Gordimer, *Living in Hope and History* (Bloomsbury: London, 2000), 90.
[16] David Medalie, "The Context of an Awful Event: Nadine Gordimer's *The House Gun*", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, vol. 25, no. 4 (1999): 642.
[17] Sue Kossew, *Writing Woman, Writing Place* (London: Routledge, 2004), 161.
[18] Gordimer, *The House Gun*, 151.

daily, nightly, in this city, in our country. Part of the furnishings in homes, carried in pockets along with car keys, even in the schoolbags of children, constantly ready to hand in situations which lead to tragedy, the guns happen to be there"[19].

In *The House Gun*, Nadine Gordimer uses the techniques employed by the TRC in order to attract attention on the banalization of violence due to excessive media coverage. She focuses on political, racial and social aspects of ordinary South African life, paralleling microcosm and macrocosm, underlining the need for reconciliation with the outcome of violent crimes, without perpetuating violence.

Trauma and the memory of the male body: *Red Dust*

South African novelist Gillian Slovo published her first novels in the 1980s, when she was one of the few detective novelists with her Kate Baeier mysteries. After 1991, she turned to literary fiction and was shortlisted for the Orange Prize for Fiction in 2004. Shortly after the official release of the first reports of the TRC in 1998, Gillian Slovo published *Red Dust* (2000), a novel that explores the most problematic aspects of the South African commission: victims relive their traumas, truth and justice may take various forms depending on the point of view the reader is willing to accept. The novel uses Slovo's observations in the amnesty hearing of the assassin of her mother, Ruth First (a journalist who was murdered in 1982, because she was an activist in the African National Congress), while underlining the fact that national reconciliation is not always a synonym with individual reconciliation.

The story revolves around Sarah Barcant, a New York human rights lawyer who returns to her homeland to represent the black South African politician Alex Mpondo, who was tortured by ex-police officer Dirk Hendricks in the 1980s. Alex gradually recalls and reveals more about what happened to him and his comrade, Steve Sizela, while they were captured and tortured by Hendricks and his superior, Piet Muller. As the truth emerges that Muller killed Sizela, Muller, who had previously scorned the commission, ends up applying for amnesty himself. As the TRC hearing unfolds, the novel explores the themes of truth, justice, and reconciliation. The complex and painful process of confronting past atrocities and the personal and societal struggles is described while examining the lingering effects of Apartheid, the moral ambiguities of the TRC process, and the intricate power dynamics between perpetrators and victims.

The narrative point of view changes with almost every chapter and includes the offenders' points of view. For instance, Piet Muller's tender thoughts about his wife make him appear more human. The novel does not justify the crimes of the former Security Police chief, but it portrays him as an individual entitled to human dignity and rights, who seeks amnesty despite the victims' outrage. However, the privileges of whites persist even in jail: Dirk Hendricks occupies a cell alone, while black inmates are crammed into the neighbouring cell. Slovo also emphasizes the victim's attitude: from initial disgust, to exhaustion, and finally to hatred.

Dirk Hendricks' repentance is portrayed ambiguously: from Alex and Sarah's perspective, Hendricks appears to be a hypocrite, pretending to be a dutiful policeman and seeing himself as a victim. However, he also seems to show genuine remorse for his acts of torture. Hendricks explains that he was indoctrinated to fight communism and its terrorists, believing he was acting in South Africa's best interest. However, his display of remorse can also be seen as a strategic move to secure amnesty: "We were taught that the enemy was all around, that we must fight communism and its terrorists with all our might. […] I did it for the good of South Africa."[20] Towards the end of trial, Dirk understands "what Archbishop Tutu had meant when he said that the truth could set you free. Dirk had felt that strength which the archbishop talked about flowing inside him."[21]

The novel, which presents Hendricks' own perspective in some chapters, depicts him as a man rather than a monster. He worries about his children who have left him and questions his loyalty to Muller. Rather than showing true remorse, Hendricks prefers to detach from the past, to avoid becoming a prisoner of memories so that he can become part of the future South Africa. Slovo insists on the meaning of repentance as justice is compromised when perpetrators only need to tell the truth,

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[19] Gordimer, *The House Gun*, 267.
[20] Gillian Slovo. *Red Dust.* (London: Virago Press, 2000), 131.
[21] Slovo, *Red Dust*, 251.

without showing remorse or a change of attitude. This issue is highlighted at the end of the novel when Muller takes advantage of the situation and applies for amnesty. As a victim, in the beginning Alex views the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as torture: "It had taken years for Alex to recover, even partially, from what Hendricks had done to him. Years in which he'd wake up after two hours and know there was no more sleeping that night, when the smell of a Lux soap bar or a particular brand of cheap cologne or a floor polish would be enough to annihilate everything but that moment, frozen in its agony, when only death offered relief."[22] The recounting of injustice and suffering is not seen as a mere return to the past, but rather "as a dialogical developed liberation from the shackles of the past"[23]. This recounting is meant to allow South Africans to publicly discuss their suffering and injustices, thereby restoring human dignity and human rights. As the testimonies move forward, Alex gets used to "his past being excavated and there was nothing he could do to shut it out"[24]. The victim must face the torturer, listen to his explanations, accept (or not) his apologies, and reconcile (or not) with the past so that another piece of the reconciliation puzzle can find its place: "a war of races, a war of supremacy had led them all to this place. But now the war was over and the Truth Commission was there to arbitrate peace."[25]

The novel is a microcosm of the South African nation, with a disguised control inherited from the Apartheid period persisting in the justice system. Former torturers seek to maintain control over their diminishing world, without any remorse for their victims.

South Africa has changed in the process of dealing with trauma and searching for reconciliation and the end of the novel focuses on change. Slovo uses Sarah, the lawyer, to reflect on the how truth can help victims reconciliate with their past, taking into account the TRC's purpose was restorative justice and not retributive one. Truth is elusive and reconciliation is not a process that takes place between individuals but "a society-wide reconciliation."[26] Before leaving for New York, Sarah reflects on her arrival, "remembering how alien the town had seemed then and how unreal. Now, looking through one window, she took in all the old familiarities, the brilliant light, the harsh, dry scent, the distant, lilting interchanges. The feeling of home. […] this country defined her. It would be with her no matter where she was."[27] Contemporary South African life is marked by "heroism, sacrifice and guilt"[28] and will not return to the unjust and oppressive past.

Red Dust offers nuanced points of view of the challenges faced by South Africans in achieving justice and healing the wounds of a violent history (caused by the people of the South African nation), focusing both on personal and on collective journeys toward reconciliation and the quest for an elusive truth.

Trauma and the memory of the female body: *Period Pain*

Twenty years after the South African nation began to overtly speak about trauma the young generation of writers still bears the marks of injustice and violence. Although the results of the TRC may not have been the ones that had been stated in 1995, there is an unarguable effect that can be seen in contemporary literary creations: literature is used as a means of exposing trauma, connecting past events to present confessions, and searching for the appropriate method of reconciliating with the past (restorative approach rather than a retributive one).

Kopano Matlwa attracted the public's attention in 2007 when she published her first novel, *Coconut.* She belongs to a "post-Gordimer and post-Coetzee generation"[29] that questions the old themes and subject matters and focuses on displacement, immigration, xenophobia, feminism, illness and the appalling state of the health system and rape. The topic of reconciliation with the violent past history is no longer related directly to South African history, but rather to an individual past that can

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[22] Slovo, *Red Dust*, 30.

[23] Michael Bösch and Susanne Kaul, "The Right to Tell That It Hurt: Fiction and Political Performance of Human Rights in South Africa" in *Imagining Human Rights,* eds. Susanne Kaul and David Kim (London: DeGruyter, 2015), 180.

[24] Slovo, *Red Dust*, 30.

[25] Slovo, *Red Dust*, 313.

[26] Slovo, *Red Dust*, 318.

[27] Slovo, *Red Dust*, 338.

[28] Slovo, *Red Dust*, 338.

[29] Michael Chapman, "Writing, Interpreting Fiction in South Africa: The Last 30 Years", *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa*, 34:1 (2022): 4, DOI: 10.1080/1013929X.2022.2034892

be traced back to the South African history. In fact, every individual story is part of the enormous puzzle of South African identity. The novel that I have chosen for the present study is *Period Pain,* first published in 2017 and republished in 2018 with the title *Evening Primrose*. It is considered by critics as a narrative of black pain that uses language specific to the Apartheid period to deal with discrimination based on race and xenophobia. It is "a story of change in contemporary South Africa, a "postcolony" that might not quite be a postcolony"[30].

The story follows Masechaba and her journey to reclaim her life after a traumatic episode. Masechaba, a young graduate, is an intern in a hospital in South Africa. The narrative is infused with political and social pressures, including unemployment, xenophobia, and the influence of Masechaba's mother, a very religious woman who harbours a deep dislike for foreigners. Before graduating, Masechaba experiences a personal loss, leading her to question God's presence in the world, but, at the same time, to have daily personal conversations with Him.

There is a quiet, latent anger simmering within the community where Masechaba works, threatening the entire community. However, Masechaba is too preoccupied with her own struggles to notice. Nyasha, Masechaba's Zimbabwean colleague and flat mate, claims that black South Africans remain subjugated by white supremacy. However, it is Masechaba's mother and other black South Africans who believe that foreigners from neighbouring countries practice black magic and steal everything from them. As the story unfolds, incidents of xenophobic violence escalate, deeply impacting Masechaba's life and work. Frustrated by Nyasha's prejudice and eager to show her that most South Africans do not support the violence, Masechaba starts a petition to demonstrate her hospital's stance against xenophobia. This action draws media attention, leading to a sharp and brutal outcome. The novel depicts a South Africa where dangerous tensions simmer below the surface, with the unrest in the country reflected in the microcosm of the hospital. Masechaba's perspective is crucial—not only as a black South African woman and a doctor but also as a woman diagnosed with endometriosis. This condition profoundly shapes Masechaba's experiences and motivates her to become a doctor. Xenophobia is the word that characterizes the environment of the hospital, and at a certain moment Masechaba apologises to Nyasha, after a colleague suggests she could get sick from sharing a bottle with a Zimbabwean. Nyasha shrugs: "It's just a period South Africa's in,' she said matter-of-factly. 'Growing pains'."[31]

The third part of the novel begins with Masechaba facing an unavoidable confrontation with her own body after being gang-raped by colleagues at the hospital in retaliation for her anti-xenophobic activism. The detailed description of the rape is structured as a conversation between Masechaba and God, as she tries to understand her situation, perhaps in an attempt to reconcile with the awful event: "There is no vocabulary for the pain I feel. How do I construct a sentence that explains that they made me into a shell of myself? Not 'like' a shell of myself, but an actual shell of myself? How do I explain that what they stole from me is more than just my 'womanhood' or any of that condescending stuff people like to talk about, but a thing that once lost can never be found because it is unnamed? How do I explain that the languages at my disposal can't communicate the turmoil I have inside? […] 'I was raped.'"[32]

The psychologist she works with advises her to put the whole event into words, as using the past tense to describe the rape will help her overcome the situation and reconciliate with her past. However, it words cannot help her: "I'm still being raped even now, even when I'm not. I can't say when one stopped and the other began. I am being rape."[33] The final part of the novel concludes with a glimmer of hope for Masechaba who becomes the mother of a baby girl, whose birth heals the woman who decides that this is the new beginning she desired.

Period Pain also examines the themes of the lingering effect of Apartheid laws, gender-based violence and mental health issues. These themes strongly connected with the female body and mind, the role of the family the post-Apartheid period and le body and mind. Reconciliation of the violent past cannot rely on testimonies base on memories because: "History is a con man; history writes and changes stories to suit the times (their times!) and memory is weak and unreliable."[34]

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[30] Chapman, "Writing, Interpreting Fiction in South Africa: The Last 30 Years", 25.

[31] Kopano Matlwa, *Period Pain* (Jacana Media, 2017), 82.

[32] Matlwa, *Period Pain*, 118.

[33] Matlwa, *Period Pain*, 118.

[34] Matlwa, *Period Pain*, 121.

Conclusion

The three novels that belong to three different periods in the South African history of literature underline the importance of the much-debated South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission: *The House Gun*, written when the first testimonies were being released by the mass-media, *Red Dust*, written after the publication of the first reports of the TRC and *Period Pain* written in the context of the postcolonial South Africa. The three female writers have used different personal experiences and different topics that are relevant for post-Apartheid and postcolonial South Africa. Trauma, caused by different events, is at the centre of each novel, while the reconciliation process is described in detail, although there is no common solution for the process. The microcosm of the family, of the community or of the female body parallels the microcosm of South Africa, every individual history being a piece in the enormous jigsaw puzzle that is South African memory and history.

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IDENTITY PATTERNS AND (POST)MODERN PARADIGM
IN ANTHONY BURGESS' NOVELS

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Rezumat: Unul dintre cei mai importanți reprezentanți ai literaturii britanice din secolul XX, Anthony Burgess a fost întotdeauna fascinat de strălucita epocă a teatrului elisabetan și mai cu seamă de figurile marcante ale acesteia, William Shakespeare și Christopher Marlowe. Din acest motiv, el a dedicat două dintre cele mai importante romane ale sale (*Ochii Doamnei mele* și *Moartea la Deptford*) tocmai marilor săi predecesori. Situat simbolic între modernism și postmodernism și refuzând să accepte până la capăt o raportare clară la poetica postmodernă, Burgess a rămas o problemă deschisă pentru critica literară, adesea pusă în încurcătură de extraordinara sa abilitate de a jongla cu conceptele și de a-și exprima ideile într-un mod atât de original.

Abstract: One of the most important representatives of British literature of the 20th century, Anthony Burgess was always fascinated by the illustrious cultural era of Elizabethan theatre, and most of all by its most glorious figures, William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe. This is the reason why he dedicated two of his intriguing novels (*Nothing Like the Sun* and *A Dead Man in Deptford*) exactly to these great predecessors. Symbolically situated somewhere in-between modernism and postmodernism and refusing to admit any close relation to the postmodern poetics, Burgess has remained an open problem to the literary critics, puzzled by his extraordinary ability to play with concepts and to express his ideas in such an original way.

Cuvinte-cheie: modernism, postmodernism, teatru elisabetan, ironie, strategii narative, parodie.

Keywords: Modernism, Postmodernism, Elizabethan Theatre, Irony, Narrative Strategies, Parody.

Introduction

Anthony Burgess exposed his conception regarding the meaning of art and the role of the artist in society in different historical eras, in several of his essays. In his view, the entire universe is based on a paradox (but an apparent one), according to which stability is generated by hidden conflicts. For, as the British writer said, "we are fully aware only of the contradiction of opposites: good/bad, white/black, poor/rich and so on.

The stability of our entire existence seems to depend very much on these oppositions."[1] That is precisely why he used the term "douverse", instead of the established one, "universe",[2] to emphasize the complex structure of the world we live in, and to highlight the role of the artist in this context – namely the imperative to offer a vision of the essential unity, beyond any system of oppositions, a unity which, if carefully looked at, proves to be eternal, real and very effective.

Anthony Burgess and William Shakespeare

If we go beyond the level of an interpretation strictly centred on facts, this conception is also obvious in Burgess's novel *Nothing Like the Sun* (1964), a text centred upon the image of William Shakespeare (WS), as Burgess saw him, and upon the great playwright's "love life", as imagined by the author of *A Clockwork Orange*, who wanted to celebrate, through this novel, four centuries since Great Will's birth. But above his intricate love affairs, WS is a man primarily dedicated to the art of literature and who sees his destiny accordingly, believing that the ultimate purpose of his existence and his art is to create exquisite images of order and beauty out of the fabric of ugliness, sin, all forms

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[1] Anthony Burgess, "Conflict and Confluence", in *Urgent Copy* (New York: Norton, 1968), 293.
[2] Burgess, "Conflict and Confluence", 294.

of human misery or chaos that seemed to rule the lives of ordinary people by that time. Like Burgess, this Shakespeare is convinced that art takes form only from this system of oppositions which make the entire universe (more precisely, the entire "duoverse") as it is, i.e. permanently doubly (sometimes multiple) articulated.

Much has been written about Anthony Burgess and the most adequate framing of his writings, from *A Clockwork Orange* (1962) to *Nothing Like the Su*n or *A Dead Man in Deptford* (1993), hesitating between modernism and postmodernism, aesthetic orientations to which the writer was close and whose specific ideas can be found in several of his creations. But interestingly enough, although certain modernist elements seem to dominate at least some of his novels or essays, postmodernism can be found, as an ideology and a general vision, in many of the texts that the writer published during the last part of his life. If at its literary beginnings the concern for defining the identity of the artist and the meaning of his work in a world constantly changing was related to the modernist aesthetics, the relationship between the writer and language and more specifically that between different literary texts always seen in a complex process of mutual influence lead the reader foresee the postmodernist ideology. However, it should not be forgotten that Burgess himself rejected the postmodernist label, stating that "postmodernism, as it is called, is entirely contained within modernism."[3] As the writer often underlined, it is always necessary a dual understanding of the universe, so that his own work embodies a doubly articulated structure, many literary critics talking about a gradual transition from modernism to postmodernism during his creative life.

It is well-known that modernist novels have "an epistemological approach",[4] as this was called (the term itself having been coined by Brian McHale), by means of specific artistic strategies (the stream of consciousness, the meanings of myth always to be found in the profound structure of text, formal stylization, etc.), with the aim of saving, existentially and essentially, the amorphous universe of the contingent. On the other hand, the postmodern pattern was interpreted as a separate development, but also as a response at the aesthetic level that the new type of fiction gives to the aesthetics of canonical modernism, by structuring an ontology of plurality and, equally, of formal and thematic instability. The novel *Nothing Like the Sun* stands for, in the context of Burgess' work, precisely this tension and permanent effort of communication between the two orientations. On the other hand, from a thematic point of view, the text traces the artistic formation of WS (the kinship with the traditional *Bildungsroman* is also obvious, especially if we take into account the initiatory meanings of the journey undertaken by the protagonist) in the middle of a universe that he sees as a world placed under the sign of chaos; this way Burgess gives voice to one of his main concerns (but also to one of the major themes of modernism), namely the exploration of how art manifests itself in a well-defined system of historical circumstances (i.e., the glorious Elizabethan era).

On a formal level, the book is structured as a fictional biography of WS, and its purpose is to evaluate the hidden implications of fiction in a definite epoch. In addition, the epilogue, where a hitherto unknown voice asks fundamental questions about the identity of the narrator, unexpectedly annihilates the border, which was already fragile, between the historical and the fictional universes. Thus the modernist preoccupation with order and meaning gives way to a playful inquiry into the techniques necessary to impose the principle of order in a world dominated by formal chaos. It is obvious that structuring the novel with this double pattern in mind provides the general framework in which WS's theory (which is also Burgess's) regarding the artistic process that arises on the basis of a system of constant oppositions can be developed both thematically and textually. Consequently, the role of the artist is, from Burgess's perspective, that of generating meaning in a world dominated by chaos, or at least, of providing the illusion of a coherent meaning, in order to respond, thus, to the continuous confrontation of opposites. Therefore, art is the result of the relationship of definite aesthetic forces which configure this dual universe, the original "duoverse" that Burgess always spoke of. We should also keep in mind that T.S. Eliot himself described the experience of the common individual as "chaotic and fragmentary", the artistic vocation being found in the ability to transform all individual suffering into something artistically enriched, thus into something universal. The protagonist named WS in *Nothing Like the Sun* does not understand his purpose in the world any other way, highlighting the relationship between illness and death, on the one hand, and the need to

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[3] Burgess, "Conflict and Confluence", 295.
[4] Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (London and New York: Methuen, 1987), 7.

overcome them through an aesthetic vision, especially through words and the intricate literary art. That is why the entire novel can be read from a double perspective: for example, when the protagonist talks about honour and duty in front of the young and impetuous Harry Wriothesley, advising him to abandon all his ambitious plans. This discourse is equally a defence of (literary) art, seen as the only possible way to control evil in every human being. The purpose of a true artist – ultimately, of the human being – becomes, viewed from this perspective, the permanent attempt to make the impossible possible. But for Burgess's character, evil is not completely excluded, but it is preserved, even if only in the obscure background, being forever that destructive force operating at different levels of the text, determining the transition from epistemological to ontological dominance, i.e. from the modernist preoccupation with structures invested with meaning to the postmodern interrogation of structures themselves.

Literary critics unanimously considered that the novel *Nothing Like the Sun* has a structure that can be called "dialogic", to use the term imposed by Mikhail Bakhtin.[5] And it is true that the novel does not lack carnivalesque scenes either, able to perfectly define the Elizabethan universe, another example of *coincidentia oppositorum*. A close analysis of the meanings of this specific structure reveals the hidden forces which, at first, seem exclusively negative (both for WS's work and for Burgess himself). After all, nothing would have happened on an artistic level if the protagonist's existence had not been affected by various encounters with female characters, by forbidden attractions, by unconsumed (or excessively consumed) passions. And above all, Burgess builds the novel on the basis of an obvious opposition, working primarily at the level of the narrative as such, (reality/fiction), adding fictional details otherwise missing (details which remain forever shrouded in the mystery of Shakespeare's real existence). That is why the book begins more or less like a traditional novel, in the first part the author being focused on WS's discovery of his artistic vocation, but also on the intuition of the difficulties he would be face with if he chooses this difficult path. The text is built as a narrative that combines the third-person speech with moments of indirect-free speech or stream-of-consciousness, each interrupted by sequences in which WS himself speaks in the first person. The aesthetics of the great modernism seem to dominate, going over the differences of nuance or historical era, like in the modernist fiction authored by James Joyce or Virginia Woolf.

But this structure, which only gives the impression of being extremely stable, is constantly called into question by means of the numerous insertions of another narrative voice, attributed to a professor named "Mr. Burgess", who delivers a veritable farewell lecture to his students. Of course this Mr. Burgess may or may not, just as well, be equated with an original form of dramatization of the real author named Anthony Burgess, who takes upon himself the purpose of highlighting the artistic evolution of WS and his discovery of the artistic calling, tracing his path from a modest glover, if he was to follow his father's job, to that of a brilliant poet and playwright. The dialogic structure of the novel is even better underlined by Burgess's constant appeal to some specific strategies considered by most exegetes, despite the major theme of the book, to belong to the area of postmodern aesthetics. In this context, the introduction of the book must be seen as a genuine and symbolic narrative space in which the novel's dual (dialogical) structure is already fully articulated. It provides the reader with essential information about the identity of the narrator and the purpose of his narrative, as Professor Burgess addresses his "extraordinary" students in a distant land, "who complained to him that Shakespeare had nothing to offer to the East."[6] Even the word "nothing" is a clear reference to the title of the novel itself, *Nothing Like the Sun*, in its turn an intertextual reference to Shakespeare's *Sonnet 130*, where the conventions of courtly love are put into question, while the poet suggests that all the lovers glorified in the poem were, in reality, completely different from what the lyrics dedicated to them described... In fact, the lines from this famous sonnet (the ones that contain the phrase from the novel's title) are even quoted by Burgess, in the dedication-epigraph of his book: "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;/ Coral is far more red than her lips' red:/ If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;/ If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head."[7] The dual nature of love and, to an

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[5] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Edited and translated by Caryl Emerson, Introduction by Wayne C. Booth (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 129.

[6] Anthony Burgess, *Nothing Like the Sun. A Story of Shakespeare's Love Life* (London & New York: Norton & Co, 1996), 344.

[7] Burgess, *Nothing Like the Sun,* 12.

equal extent, of literature is thus highlighted, this being also the essential concern, beyond the strict level of the plot, in Burgess's own novel.

Nevertheless, the system of oppositions suggested so far is undoubtedly more complex, covering the duality of body/spirit, reason/desire and so on. Even the always double figure of the author (after all, which author: of the preface, of the text, of the poems along the way?) brings to mind the relationship (very important in postmodernist fiction) between author and the reader, always seen in constant dialogue, meant to reveal the hidden meaning of the text. It is as if Burgess the author disappears in order to make way (more precisely, to metamorphose into) to two different but deeply related characters: on the one hand, Mr. Burgess the narrator of WS's history, and on the other, Mr. Burgess the character who appears right through the narrative. The writer himself explained the stages of this creative process in a well-known essay *(Genesis and Headache)*, stating that he tried to suddenly transpose his reader into a "relaxed" state of mind, to get him ready to grasp the irony with which many of the great concerns of the Elizabethan age and literature are treated.[8] In the end, however, in the symbolic and ironic Epilogue, the borders between the narrator and the character are almost completely blurred and it is difficult to say which is which, as long as between reality and fiction it is almost impossible to establish a clear difference. WS and Mr. Burgess seem to be one and the same; the father takes the place of the son, and the writer (the subject of this work of art) turns into the very act of writing: "Still, I won't be sorry to go. I am not seduced by the idea of this life with its delicate pleasures, clothed in the cool, green, clean cloth of an English spring. If you plunge into that darkness, you will eventually rise in the form of a dazzling sun. And that's exactly what I'm going to do tonight."[9] Then, the reappearance of the author's voice as the ghost of Hamlet's father merges WS and Mr. Burgess ("It happened on the stage. I was playing Hamlet. I was playing the part of the Ghost") in a way that can easily confuse even the greatest scholars of postmodernism: "You want to know who's really talking?"[10] This is the question uttered by a hard-to-identify voice that could be WS, Lord Burgess, both, or conversely, neither. Because here's what it says next: "Here, ladies and gentlemen, we're not playing anybody's game. I'm sick and tired, and I miss my East. I am leaving."[11]

The transition from "modernist epistemology" to "postmodern ontology"[12] is also embodied through this truly unique character called William Shakespeare, who brings alive the pages of Burgess' novel. But this fictional and completely unreliable Shakespeare has in turn a creator who seems (is?) a fictional version of a historical creator and a real person. Just as the figures of Leopold Bloom and Stephen Dedalus overlap in order to suggest the likeness of Shakespeare, in the famous scene at the National Library in Dublin in James Joyce's *Ulysses*, the fictional Professor Burgess giving the lecture that turns into the novel we read embodies the figure of the father, the creator, the demiurge: "Then what is your great crime? Love, love, always love. You can never win, for love is both an image of eternal order and the rebellious and destructive spirochete. Literature is a secondary phenomenon, derived from the action of the flesh."[13] The system of oppositions that define the profound structure of the text also takes into account the meanings of death, on the one hand, and of art, on the other; throughout the book, the identity of WS and the way he perceives it is thus in a direct relation to the thanatic domain and, equally, with the artistic one. The power of the written word thus proves much greater than it seemed at first, overcoming all the details of a definite historic age or any subjectivity of character. As WS succeeds in transfiguring his purely sexual impulse into an artistic one and he begins to polish his work, he realizes that this is the only transformation of the outer world that the human being, fatally subject to disintegration and dissipation under the action of time, can hope for. After all, art can finally save each individual – and humanity as a whole.

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[8] Anthony Burgess, "Genesis and Headache", in *After Words. Novelists on Their Novels*, ed. Thomas McCormack (New York: Harper, 1969), 32.

[9] Burgess, *Nothing Like the Sun*, 367.

[10] Burgess, *Nothing Like the Sun*, 365.

[11] Burgess, *Nothing Like the Sun*, 364.

[12] McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction,* 12.

[13] Burgess, *Nothing Like the Sun*, 362.

Anthony Burgess and Christopher Marlowe

Burgess's fascination with the glorious years of English Renaissance and its great figures does not limit to Shakespeare, but reaches for the other British writer considered Great Will's most important contemporary (rival or even precursor), Christopher Marlowe.

About Marlowe (1564-1593), Elizabethan poet, translator and playwright, one of the creators of the white verse, who died prematurely, before turning thirty, under conditions that were never fully clarified, many books have been written. But the hypotheses formulated by the various researchers did not bring the necessary certainties, since many of them were based on pure assumptions and on disparate and/or incomplete documents. This is why a real legend was gradually built around him, a legend comparable, to some extent, to the one that surrounds the biography of Shakespeare himself. Interestingly, however, in the case of Marlowe (whose name has often been spelled differently: Marling, Marley or even Merlin), precise biographical elements are not missing; at least until a certain moment in his life. Thus, it is known that the future playwright was born in Canterbury, in the family of a shoemaker; that he attended the school there and from 1580 he was enrolled at Corpus Christi College in Cambridge, as a beneficiary of the scholarship established by Matthew Parker, the future archbishop of Canterbury. Later, things get complicated, and the documents of the time are contradictory and evasive: in 1587, an intervention in his favour by the Privy Council is attested, intended to help him complete his studies, despite the fact that, apparently, the young Marlowe was suspected of having converted to Catholicism and of wanting to move to France. The suggestion of the authorities was, however, that Marlowe's actions were dictated by political reasons, inferring from this that his activities would have been ordered by the secret services. These are some of the elements attested by numerous 16th century documents that Burgess uses in his novel *A Dead Man in Deptford*, published in 1993, the year of the commemoration of Marlowe's tragic death.

But the novelist's passion for the great playwright is much older, as he himself testifies in an Author's Note, placed at the end of this book. Thus, in 1940, amid the turmoil caused by the beginning of the Second World War, Burgess was working on his undergraduate thesis (dedicated to Marlowe, but destroyed during German air raids). After more than two decades, in 1964, Burgess planned to write a novel about Marlowe, but, being the four-centenary of Shakespeare's birth, the novelist published *Nothing Like the Sun*. But he did not abandon the Marlowe project, accomplishing it at the end of his life, "according to the powers of a writer who has reached old age".[14]

The book begins with the presentation of the young Kit Marlowe, a student of theology, but without any religious vocation, a prisoner of a rigid and dogmatic academic system that he accepts out of necessity, rather than out of free choice. Nonconformist and ironic, passionate about words and rhymes, drawn to the universe of poetry and fascinated by theatrical illusion, Kit cannot imagine his own future other than away from the realm of a religion that, as he clearly understands, it is nothing more than another political instrument meant to serve the interests of those in power. Therefore, he does not hesitate when, meeting by chance a certain Tom Watson, one of the agents of Francis Walsingham, the head of the secret service, and this Watson asks him to come to London, Marlowe agrees and tries to see what he can do for his country. Attracted by the prospect of a future life in the capital, by the earnings he would get from his secret activities, but also eager for adventure and wishing to meet new people, Marlowe signs a document whose long-term implications he does not quite understand by that time, but which he doesn't pay much attention to either. This has, obviously, the most serious consequences. Sent on several missions to France to find evidence of the plot hatched by the exiled Catholics to assassinate Queen Elizabeth, Kit enters the dangerous game of betrayal and disguise, successfully hiding his true intentions, pretending to try to clarify some religious issues, and meets people who, in turn, pretend to be others, in a dangerous dance in which no one can be trusted. At this stage, Kit still thinks everything is but a youthful adventure and a pure game meant to help him learn things which he can later use in the future playwright career he wants to build. Therefore, he enters various combinations and is involved in a passionate relationship with Thomas Walsingham, the nephew of his superior. However, gradually, his prospects darken, and Marlowe understands that the secret service is by no means something that can be abandoned when one wants to on the contrary; it acts exactly like all those religious dogmas from which he had desperately tried to free himself. His

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[14]Anthony Burgess, *A Dead Man in Deptford* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 298.

job was nothing but another form of captivity, but a more dangerous one, as long as there is only one possible escape from it: death.

Beyond the plot, the way Burgess constructed the character of Marlowe is exquisite. Kit is by no means idealized; he is not a saint, on the contrary: he does not hesitate to make fun of the sacred texts, to get involved in various controversies (even to defend his point of view with his fist). But the same Kit, who drinks too much and does not hide his homosexuality, is an enlightened spirit, able to rise above the prejudices of his age: for him, the much-claimed Catholic threat does not mean more than the notion of Protestant solidarity, as long as he knows very well, growing up in the Huguenot environment of Canterbury, that people aren't better just because they belong to some ethnic or religious group, whatever they may be. Gratuitously spilled blood, whether Catholic or Protestant, hurts Kit just as much (certain fragments remind the reader of the violence to be found in another Burgess novel, *A Clockwork Orange*, just as some passionate scenes refer to *Earthly Powers*); so, especially after witnessing a few executions, he wishes more and more to be able to withdraw to the ordinary world of common people and to follow his artistic passion. But this won't happen, of course. When he wants to break definitively from the dangerous world of secret services, his superiors consider that he knows too much to ever be truly free again. In addition, Kit feels that he no longer finds his place and that he can no longer belong to any world: smart and always with a sharp line on his lips, he is rejected by the less gifted contemporary playwrights, and Sir Walter Raleigh, for example, whom he also knows, only approaches him when he can get something from him.

Far above his time in conceptions and understanding, close, if we took into account the way he is imagined in Burgess' novel, rather to the spirit and contradictions of the modern age than to the Elizabethan period, Kit Marlowe is a complex and contradictory character, good and evil, traitor and faithful, a perfect expression of a unique world, the Elizabethan England, which itself seems to be under the sign of seemingly irreconcilable contrasts. Thus, the theatres are next to brothels or animal fighting arenas, private disagreements turn almost instantly into problems of the whole community, violence is always tasted by those around, who do not hesitate to turn into a passionate audience. "All the world's a stage", as Shakespeare rightly put it. And the London through which Marlowe moves around in this novel is nothing else but a huge theatre, only that, despite its dimensions, this theatre seems to become extremely small when Kit seeks shelter or when he needs the peace of anonymity: he is always watched, listened to, followed. Supervised. His youthful commitment with the secret service meant, for him, the conclusion of a veritable Faustian pact – Burgess' suggestion is not at all accidental, if we consider that one of Marlowe's best plays (and one of the masterpieces of the world theatre) is *The Tragic History of Doctor Faust*. For the young playwright, life mirrors art, as it is firmly stated in his *Faust* and also proved by his own existence, as he had always been in search of those great aesthetic truths. But the reality of his life leads him through a labyrinth of intricate paths whose exits are always brutally and mercilessly closed, as if to doom his fate. Ingram Frizer, servant of Thomas Walsingham, kills him in Deptford, as if to confirm what had already been suggested several times throughout this novel: knowledge is like a lethal weapon. And Kit dies from a dagger wound that pierces his eye, but his death is determined not only by the person who hit him, but also by a well-woven plot meant to serve high political interests, especially because, in the terms of that age, Marlowe had committed the mortal sin of freethinking.

Conclusions

A veritable tour de force at the stylistic level, this novel fascinates the reader by means of the numerous quotes taken from various poetic or dramatic creations of the Elizabethan period, and also by some perfectly-dosed phrases in Latin, proving that here, as well as in *Nothing Like the Sun*, Anthony Burgess lures his public precisely to the extent that he seems to use a difficult style, accessible only to literary initiates. The book also encloses some deliberately anachronistic allusions to Gerard Manley Hopkins, as well as references to Giordano Bruno (named after his hometown) or Joyce – whose work had always fascinated Burgess who dedicated him a substantial essay entitled *ReJoyce*, emphasizing his preferences for intellectual games, as well as for the subversive effects of irony. *A Dead Man at Deptford* is also an extraordinary novel of the big city, London progressively becoming a character, even the symbolic protagonist of many pages, along with the protagonist involved in those events that seem to transform the text into a contemporary thriller set in the atmosphere of the 16th century England. In addition, Burgess uses a narrative strategy that he manages

with an extraordinary art and whose meanings he (partially) hints at in the end. Namely, the narrative voice (the narration is in the first person, often the perspective adopted relying on Marlowe's own opinions) is that of a certain Jack Wilson. But we should not forget that the name of the author of this novel was John Anthony (Burgess) Wilson... And the final paragraph of the book underlines this idea: "Now the true author speaks to you, I, the one who endures these deaths, who feeds this flame. I take off my ill-executed mask and, four hundred years after that death at Deptford, mourn it as if it happened yesterday."[15] Some interpreters have spoken about the elements of postmodernism that Burgess implied here, only that his approach is much more serious than any postmodern pastiche or parody. And it is also a proof that the virtue of a historical novel, as the author suggests in this book, lies in its vice: the categorical imposition of possibility as real fact.

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[15] Burgess, *A Dead Man in Deptford,* 325.

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REPRESENTING AND LEGITIMIZING A NATION:
COMPLEXITY AND FRAGMENTATION IN MAXIMALIST AMERICAN NOVELS[1]

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Rezumat: Acest articol încearcă să exploreze modalitățile prin care romanele maximaliste publicate în a doua jumătate a secolului al XX-lea pot fi privite în continuare ca instrumente utile în reprezentarea și legitimarea națiunii americane. Între local și internațional, lucrarea de față chestionează posibilitatea de a cuprinde particularitățile unui peisaj literar și cultural complex și fragmentat prin intermediul unui model narativ ambițios și complicat, considerat adesea ca ilustrând cel mai bine formele contemporane excesive de consum și proliferare a informației.

Abstract: This article tries to explore the ways in which maximalist novels published in the second half of the twentieth century can still be considered meaningful instruments for the representation and legitimization of the American nation. Between local and international, this paper addresses the possibility of encompassing the particularities of a complex and fragmented literary and cultural landscape by means of an ambitious and intricate narrative model that is often considered to best illustrate the contemporary excessive forms of consumption and proliferation of information.

Cuvinte-cheie: Romane maximaliste; Marele roman american; Postmodernism; Narațiune enciclopedică; Thomas Pynchon; David Foster Wallace.

Keywords: Maximalist Novels; The Great American Novel; Postmodernism; Encyclopaedic Narrative; Thomas Pynchon; David Foster Wallace.

According to Stefano Ercolino, maximalist novels can be described as a hybrid genre that started to develop from the second half of the 20th century in the United States of America, then migrated to Europe and Latin America.[2] Building on the same premise, the present text aims, on the one hand, to problematize the theoretical context in which this type of narratives appears and develops in the US-American literary landscape and, on the other hand, to explore the ways in which maximalist novels published in the second half of the twentieth century can still be considered meaningful instruments for the representation and the legitimization of the American nation. Three of the seven novels on which Ercolino grounds his argument represent the primary bibliography for this article too. From Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow,*[3] perhaps the most discussed book of the "maximalist canon", to David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*[4] and finally to Don DeLillo's *Underworld,*[5] I investigate the conditions under which these novels establish themselves as central both to American literature in the broad sense and, on a smaller scale, to the maximalist form. At the same time, the analysis observes how the particularities of a complex and fragmented literary and cultural landscape can be encompassed by means of an ambitious and intricate narrative model that is often considered to best illustrate the contemporary tendencies of excessive consumption and proliferation of information.

In addition to the conditions related to the texts mentioned above, I am interested in the theoretical and critical connections to the social and historical moment in which these works emerge,

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[2] Stefano Ercolino, *The Maximalist Novel. From Thomas Pynchon's "Gravity's Rainbow" to Roberto Bolaño's "2666"*, translated by Albert Sbragia (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), xiv.
[3] Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow* (New York: Penguin, 1973 [2000]).
[4] David Foster Wallace, *Infinite Jest* (New York: Little, 1996 [2006]).
[5] Don DeLillo, *Underworld* (New York: Scribner, 1997).

their relation to the American literary tradition, as well as the ways in which this tradition and its most representative works are shaped and shape each other in different literary periods. The stakes of the text are thus twofold: on the one hand, to highlight the particularities of these projects from a formal perspective, and on the other, to contextualize and delineate the manner in which a cluster of literary works that can be described through apparently common formal denominators are simultaneously functioning according to different regimes of signifying nation.

Between tradition and international culture

"The novel has always been bound up with the idea of nationhood," Ralph Ellison said in 1967,[6] an observation that might seem too obvious today, when one considers the "Herder effect," so accurately theorized by Pascale Casanova in *The World Republic of Letters*,[7] and named after perhaps the most influential theorist of early cultural nationalism. Of further relevance to the present text is the junction of this quote with one of the most influential critical texts dealing with *Gravity's Rainbow*, the article "Encyclopedic Narrative: From Dante to Pynchon", published by Edward Mendelson in 1976,[8] three years after Pynchon's book appeared.

For Mendelson, the novel published in 1973 is the most outstanding representative of encyclopaedic narratives in the postmodern period. The essay refers to seven titles central to his encyclopaedic narrative, belonging to six different nations: Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, Goethe's *Faust*, Melville's *Moby-Dick*, Joyce's *Ulysses* and, finally, Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, the book around which Mendelson would further develop his theory in "Gravity's Encyclopedia," published that same year.[9] The American professor ascribes to these texts a representative function in defining a national cultural identity, while he concurrently assumes the existence of a potential shortcoming regarding his choice to refer only to works from countries with widely spoken international languages. The hypothetical example of Camões' *Os Lusíadas* expresses this assumption, following up with the apprehension of the fact that the literature of the United States of America has, in the ranks of the narratives mentioned by Mendelson, two representatives.[10]

Regarding each narrative's cultural-national function of representation, Mendelson particularly problematizes around *Gravity's Rainbow* and the figure of its author, Thomas Pynchon. Because Melville, with his *Moby-Dick* already occupies the place of the American encyclopaedic narrative, and because Pynchon "has no wish to supplant him,"[11] the author of *Gravity's Rainbow* would become representative not of the culture of a single nation, but for an international culture, "based on information, on data, instead of the old order, built on money and commercial goods."[12] This point can be correlated, in terms of an encyclopaedic self-referentiality, with the fact that Pynchon's novel also deals precisely with the subject of information and data and the way these can be represented as the "currency" of contemporary society. The "encyclopaedic narratives", Mendelson shows, are articulated through a testimonial-historical function for a given context, with all the writers listed above becoming, in one way or another, representative of their cultures of origin and established as national writers, just as the dialects they use – most obviously in the cases of Dante and Pynchon – reach a national dimension. Each of the texts Mendelson names sets its action several years before the book is published (on average, Mendelson says, there is a gap of about twenty years) and also relies on the symbol of exile: Dante writes his Divine Comedy in exile, Joyce ends his encyclopaedic project with "Trieste-Zürich-Paris," while Pynchon is himself a self-exile, in his refusal to expose himself.[13]

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[6] Ralph Ellison, "The Novel as a Function of American Democracy", in *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison,* ed. John Callahan (New York: Modern Library, 2003), 767.

[7] See Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters,* translated by M. B. DeBevoise (*La République mondiale des lettres*, 1999; Convergences, Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 2004).

[8] Edward Mendelson, "Encyclopedic Narrative: From Dante to Pynchon", *MLN*, vol. 91, no. 6, Comparative Literature Issue (December 1976): 1267-1275.

[9] Edward Mendelson, "Gravity's Encyclopedia", in *Mindful Pleasures: Essays on Thomas Pynchon*, eds. George Levine and David Leverenz (Boston, Massachusetts: Little, Brown, 1976), 161-195.

[10] Mendelson, "Encyclopedic Narrative", 1267.

[11] Mendelson, "Encyclopedic Narrative", 1271.

[12] Mendelson, "Encyclopedic Narrative", 1272.

[13] Mendelson, "Encyclopedic Narrative", 1274.

So, the question is: how American is *Gravity's Rainbow*? How American is the encyclopaedic narrative in its novelistic form (specifically its postmodern variation, exemplified by Pynchon's novel) theorized by Mendelson, and, by extension, Ercolino's maximalist novel? In order to answer these questions, I will refer, because of its polemical character, to a work that precedes the appearance of *Gravity's Rainbow* by more than a decade.

In perhaps his most representative title[14] Leslie A. Fiedler approaches the American novel from a historical perspective that, especially in what concerns me here, tries to set the literary form against the backdrop of transnational relations of discrepancy and mutuality between the American and the European poles of literary influence. The central thesis of Fiedler's book, as the title indicates, is the failure of novelists to address heterosexual love. For Fiedler: "[…] no single sub-genre of the novel was invented in the United States. Yet the peculiarities of our variants seem more interesting and important than their resemblances to the parent forms."[15]

Through parent forms, Fiedler refers to the sentimental, gothic or historical novel, all of European origin. In relation to these, the critic points out, the American novel is distinguished by its innocent, juvenile aspect, which justifies: "the incapacity of the American novelist to develop; in a compulsive way he returns to a limited world of experience, usually associated with the childhood, writing the same book over and over again until he lapses into silence or self-parody."[16] Fiedler's approach is, of course, aimed at a tradition that stretches back to Mark Twain and Herman Melville, but in his overview, he manages to set the American novel against the European one. A novel of terror,[17] for it is asexual, lamenting a world of fear and loneliness, the American anti-novel (in relation to the European) par excellence is, for Fiedler as for Mendelson, *Moby-Dick*.

However, the manner in which the two critics analyse Melville's novel, as well as their conclusions, differ significantly. In Fiedler's case, as mentioned above, the analysis focuses on the novelist's tendency "to avoid treating the passionate encounter of a man and woman, which we expect at the heart of a novel".[18] Precisely for this reason, *Moby-Dick* is a typical anti-novel (comparisons with *Madame Bovary* are numerous, not only in relation to Melville's book), devoid of female characters (to be precise, the only women who appear in the novel are the maids Miss Hussey and Aunt Charity). For Mendelson, however, the very fact that the novel does not "culminate in a completed relation of sexual love" (one of the seven points on which the critic grounds his theory)[19] constitutes a solid argument for the novel's encyclopaedism and provides a valid account of the American context. This does not demonstrate that *Moby-Dick* establishes a quintessentially American genre; rather, it highlights the novel's socio-historical representativeness, constituting an encyclopaedic American depiction of the nation and society at a given time, according to Mendelson's canon.

As far as *Gravity's Rainbow* is concerned, as I have already pointed out, it is a narrative of universal culture, transcending the confines of American culture. From a structural point of view, the complex, multi-layered nature of Pynchon's work defies traditional narrative forms, reflecting a fragmented, interconnected world that challenges readers to find coherence within its intricate web. This dynamic between the internal and external dimensions of the novel (which can be associated with a certain openness regarding the geo-political borders of a nation) is illustrated by the novel's plot structure. The narrative has an almost "paranoically"[20] mode of development, a tendency of building characters and situations that could be described as anarchetypal,[21] also associated with an "emerging new international order" that "tends towards an osmotic permeabilization of borders, thereby only confirming generalized economic, cultural and demographic phenomena".[22]

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[14] Leslie A. Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York: Criterion Books, 1960).
[15] Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel,* xviii.
[16] Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel,* xix.
[17] Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel,* xxi.
[18] Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel,* xix.
[19] Mendelson, "Encyclopedic Narrative", 1270-1273.
[20] George Levine, "Risking the Moment: Anarchy and Possibility in Pynchon's Fiction", in *Thomas Pynchon,* edited and with an introduction by Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea Publishers House, 1986), 67.
[21] Corin Braga, *De la arhetip la anarhetip* (Iași: Polirom, 2006), 252. It is true that Braga refers to Pynchon's novels without naming *Gravity's Rainbow* (though he explicitly designates *V* [1963] as a strong representative of the anarchetype). However, I consider that the concept suits the novel published in 1973 even better than the one published ten years earlier.
[22] Braga, *De la arhetip la anarhetip,* 268.

Pynchon's novel displays numerous (sub-)plots, seemingly unrelated, except for the fact that they share World War II as mutual context. However, all these threads communicate at an underground level in a web whose eventual endpoint would be the extermination of mankind with a missile that "reaches its last unmeasurable gap above the roof of this old theatre, the last delta-t",[23] but about which neither the narrator nor the critics can say with certainty whether it signifies a "symbol of divinely prefigured salvation or the triumph of an absolute violence."[24] The first part, "Beyond the Zero" begins with motto from Wernher von Braun, a rocket scientist: "Nature does not know extinction; all it knows is transformation. Everything science has taught me, and continues to teach me, strengthens my belief in the continuity of our spiritual existence after death."[25]

This reference emphasizes Pynchon's objective to relativize a fundamentally pragmatic field, that of science, by investing it with a dimension that refers not to extinction but to transformation, to a "trace" that undermines an approach typical to logical positivism. Validating a transcendental vision of the afterlife, Pynchon's project places itself from the outset under the sign of an attitude that epistemically defies the rules of modernity. In narrative terms, the first part comprises a nine-day period (18-26 December 1944), opening with the image of Captain Geoffrey "Pirate" Prentice and his dream of evacuating London, and continuing with the introduction of Tyrone Slothrop, a lieutenant in the US Army, the main character of the book, who suffers from a bizarre condition: every time he feels excited, a bomb explodes. This determinism that Pynchon advances is one that, like the quote I referred to above, comes to relativize (and satirize at the same time) a subject as rigid as possible.

The longest chapter of the book, "In the Zone", is simultaneously the one in which Pynchon's narrative exhibits its anarchic valences in the most obvious way, although the time frame in which it takes place encompasses only the summer months of 1945. The multitude of digressions and nodal points that unfold over the course of nearly four hundred pages further illustrate Slothrop's trip to Nice, but, in addition to subplots such as the one that presents a schism within the Schwarzkommando (a schism that, in turn, develops into individual "peripheral" episodes that seem to self-generate ad infinitum), this third part deals with the story of Franz Pökler, a missile industry engineer. From a quantitative perspective, the story of this engineer, and not that of Slothrop, who is considered the main character of the book, occupies the most narrative space of *Gravity's Rainbow*. It is also in this chapter that family connections are drawn between Tyrone Slothrop and a character named Laszlo Jamf, a pretext for a digression that examines Slothrop's childhood and once again "modulates" and diverts the reader's attention away from the main epic thread, giving an air of radical pulverization and divagation to the entire narrative.

The final part of the novel, "The Counterforce" begins on 6 August 1945 and develops to around 1970, a period illustrated in the form of a fascist dystopia, thus shattering the temporal unity that had been established up to that point in the novel. The end of the book "solves" the riddle of the 00000 series rocket through numerous flashbacks, ending amidst a song composed by an ancestor of Tyrone Slothrop as the rocket descends above a movie theatre. The interruption, which occurs even though the narrator had by then proceeded with numerous explanatory scenarios on a micro level, has, within the overall picture, the effect of emphasizing and articulating the postmodern dimension of a work that, in the last part, touches on subjects as diverse as quantum theories and Tarot card playing.

As one can observe, this is no longer a quest of a single male character, a "story of boys," as Fiedler would call it, but a network that aims to render "the illusion of totality", in maximalist terms.[26] The novel showcases a fragmentary and disrupted tendency, i.e. a disarticulation that eventually comes to be revealed in terms of both form and content, confirming Bernard Bergonzi's intuition about the author's style even before the appearance of *Gravity's Rainbow*: "pulverising the traditional 'well-made' novel, taking its conventions into the zone of impossible elaboration,"[27] Pynchon seems to contradict Fiedler and confirm Mendelson's thesis – *Gravity's Rainbow* begins the tradition of encyclopaedic maximalism in its global-American sense. Writers such as William Gaddis and John

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[23] Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*, 755.
[24] Steven C. Weisenburger, *A* Gravity's Rainbow *Companion: Sources and Contexts for Pynchon's Novel* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 11.
[25] Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*, 7.
[26] Luc Herman, Petrus van Evijk, "Gravity's Encyclopedia Revisited: The Illusion of a Totalizing System in *Gravity's Rainbow*", in *English Studies*, vol. 90, no. 2 (April 2009): 178.
[27] Bernard Bergonzi, *The situation of the novel* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1979[1970]), 100.

Dos Passos are the ancestors of this sub-genre, but, as Ercolino points out,[28] they are not paradigmatic for the maximalist novel. The tradition to which they can be more clearly linked, and which has a close relationship with the species of novel that emerged in the second half of the 20th century in the United States, is, however, that of the Great American Novel, to which Pynchon, DeLillo and Foster Wallace all belong.

The Great American Novel and the aesthetics of difficulty

The Great American Novel, Lawrence Buell points out in his book covering a period of more than one hundred and fifty years (from the formulation of the term in 1868 by John W. De Forest, a novelist whose name does not say much today, to the most current debates) is one of the hallmarks of American literature and culture.[29] The dream of a great novel, confirming, in a "grand" way, the existence of a nation experiencing the anxiety of cultural legitimacy.[30] Buell finds no equivalent for this in other histories of national literatures in European or Eurocentric countries. The same kind of dynamic, however, is noted by the American professor in the case of Britain's preoccupation around 2000 with the national literary production. Unlike the struggle to assert a nation, as was the case with the Americans at the beginning of their period of consolidation as a nation, the British case is diametrically opposed, and Buell refers to it as representing a decline.[31]

Moving beyond the populist, nation-building movements of the second half of the 20th century, however, the anxiety of cultural legitimacy as a nation can no longer be considered the single valid explanation for the continuity of this dream. The United States have already earned its status as a world power (politically, militarily, as well as from a literary point of view), and the Great American Novel had yet to be written. Moreover, it becomes clear that "the histories of national literatures, U.S. and otherwise, can't be understood merely as autonomous processes taking shape from within."[32] Thus, it is hardly surprising that during the 1980s and 1990s, the very idea of an American literature was contested, by virtue of a systemic distrust involving "the centripetal forces that give national imaginaries continuity and contour as ideological fictions."[33] Against this background, *Underworld* and *Infinite Jest* emerge as new forms of the Great American Novel.

Revolving around the figure of Nick Shay, the director of a waste management firm, the non-linear narrative of *Underworlds* covers half a century of American history. The temporal symmetry between this novelistic framing and Shay's obsession with a baseball game from half a century earlier is only apparent, because, in the multitude of epic threads, Nick's unhappy marriage gets juxtaposed with aspects regarding his national identity, his personal genealogy and identity, blurring the boundaries between the individual and the national. However, as the title of the novel suggests, DeLillo's project constitutes a type of *underhistoryI,*[34] apparently opposing the idea of heroic or monumental events, delving instead into the overlooked and seemingly insignificant aspects of daily life.

DeLillo's version of The Great American Novel is that of a "counterhistory," as the author himself calls it.[35] The difference between Nick Shay and Tyrone Slothrop, the hyperactive young man in Pynchon's novel, is that DeLillo's character seems to be a mere witness of the aftermath of social and political disasters (the Soviet thermonuclear experiments, the Vietnam War, but also the Cuban Missile Crisis, among others). It is the nostalgic modulation that distances DeLillo from Pynchon, even with regard to the aforementioned unfortunate events, but especially in relation to baseball, to the moment the ball that haunts Shay disappears in the Giants-Dodgers game. Nostalgia, however, is

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[28] Ercolino, *The Maximalist Novel*, xii.
[29] Lawrence Buell*, The Dream of the Great American Novel* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014).
[30] Buell*, The Dream of the Great American Novel,* 12.
[31] Buell*, The Dream of the Great American Novel,* 12.
[32] Buell*, The Dream of the Great American Novel,* 14.
[33] Buell*, The Dream of the Great American Novel,* 15.
[34] Patrick O'Donnell *Latent Destinies: Cultural Paranoia and Contemporary U.S. Narrative* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 156.
[35] Don DeLillo, "The Power of History," *New York Times Magazine*, 7 September 1997, qtd. in Ercolino, *The Maximalist* Novel, 82.

used in a postmodern sense by the author (i.e. ironically), thanks to the usually flat and impersonal style of narrative practiced by DeLillo.[36]

David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* features four primary narratives intertwined in a rhizomatic structure, where the interconnected plots are nearly indistinguishable in terms of prominence. What we can understand as the main narrative vastly revolves around a narcotics rehabilitation centre and a junior tennis academy, surely an autobiographical reference, as Wallace himself was a proficient junior tennis player. Wallace distinguishes himself from his predecessors by setting the action in a dystopian future where the United States, Canada, and Mexico have merged into a North American super-state called O.N.A.N (Organization of North American Nations). This name, a nod to onanism, establishes Wallace's work as satirical from the outset.

The novel begins with the narrative focusing on the Incandenza family, particularly their youngest son, Hal, who tries to get admitted to college, but his position is jeopardized by an indeterminate condition; from this point, amplified by Hal's crisis, plots start to intertwine, without asserting any kind of dominance. A group of radicals from Quebec, called "The Wheelchair Assassins", planning a coup d'état, the environment of the tennis academy managed by James and Avril Incandenza, where young athletes undergo training, a cluster of Boston locals initiating a recovery regimen for substance dependency at the Ennet Clinic are all intertwined and brought together by a movie named, predictably, "Infinite Jest". Purportedly it captivates audiences to such a degree that post-viewing, they lose interest in everything else and ultimately meet their demise. This cinematic masterpiece is the ultimate creation of James Incandenza, one of the originators of the tennis academy recurrently referenced in the book, and its allure is so immense that both authorities and extremist factions seek to obtain a copy.

The two novels published in the 1990s can be seen in a continuity generated by the influence of the author of *Gravity's Rainbow*, because of the way in which they offer descriptions of: "a world that technological systems have made irreversibly interdependent, in which humans can no longer be separated from machines, in which extremes of order produce extremes of chaos and vice versa, in which the world of preterite souls that seems about to collapse somehow keeps turning. Yet despite these parallels and many more, from the standpoint of both DeLillo's Cold War retrospect and Wallace's postmillennial futurism, *Gravity's Rainbow* seems a long time gone."[37]

It is thus observable, in the case of the three novels already discussed (but also applicable to the whole late tradition of the Great American Novel) that the reader is confronted by a kind of "aesthetics of difficulty." The textual dimension practically becomes a mimetic tool that corresponds to the planetary amplitude of the 20th century. The overabundance of maximalist form is constituted as a medium that offers, on a formal level, the possibility of imposing a new genre through the quantitative accumulation it enhances. The multitude of rhetorical strategies identifiable in these projects is based on the textual space they can occupy. In Ercolino's highly suggestive words, "a text that aspires to rival the whole world cannot do so except by assuming the amplitude of the latter."[38] Likewise, the obsession that is built around symbolic productivity, imposing a literary product as representative for its era because of its size, speaks, along the lines of Fredric Jameson, of the progress of postmodernity and late capitalism.[39] From Pynchon to DeLillo and Wallace, the maximalist novel becomes a device that is able not just to construct psychotic characters or lay out conspiracies, but also capable to build a holistic perspective, in which no event can be understood without attempting to question and integrate all elements into a "higher" scheme, from the particular to the general, from the individual to the collective, supra-national destiny.[40]

Conclusions

In the last part of this text I would like to refer to three aspects that link the three novels already discussed. As Buell points out in his emblematic book on the Great American Novel, in every

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[36] Buell, *Great American Novel,* 454.

[37] Buell, *Great American Novel,* 453.

[38] Ercolino, *The Maximalist Novel,* 21.

[39] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 1-66, qtd. in Ercolino, *The Maximalist Novel*, 23.

[40] Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,* 111-112.

case of such works we are dealing with fetishization.[41] Whether we are talking about an object or a text, which in turn imposes a reading difficulty within the reading, this element comes to occupy a central position in the narrative.

The V-2 rocket (an emblem for World War II) from *Gravity's Rainbow* imposes not only the title of the book (which refers to the trajectory these falling rockets describe, due to the force of gravity and the deactivation of the rocket engine), but guides the reader to perceive the text as "as a satire on the very desire for grand plots or metanarratives, a desire the narrative unmasks as the terrible dynamic of a culture huddling on the brink of nuclear winter."[42]

In *Underworld*, the baseball that represents the exact size of the core of the nuclear bomb detonated by the Soviets on the day of the Giants-Dodgers game (October 3, 1951) determines the movements of the main character Nick Shay. The character of J. Edgar Hoover (former FBI director) listens to the report of the Soviets' second atomic experiment during a baseball game. The ball and, by extension, the baseball game functions as an element that marks the essential moments of the narrative even though, in fact, the novel cannot be reduced to this element. Nor is the association of the explosion of the bomb with the already famous moment among Americans when the missing ball is hit ("The Shot heard Round the World") coincidental. A quintessentially American sport, baseball functions for DeLillo as a metaphor for the author's hypostasis, thus becoming obvious that "DeLillo's agenda for *Underworld* is the composition of the national epic,"[43] that is still able to surpass local confines due to its maximalist approach.

Finally, in *Infinite Jest*, James Incandenza's copy of the film is considered a weapon of mass destruction because of its ability to create addiction in viewers and reduce them to the position where they can perform no other action than to watch this project repeatedly. By fetishizing this object, Wallace also raises the issue of the obsolescence of the book as an object, as art,[44] but more importantly, he renders, even in the dystopian future of the book, the problem of the American (and also beyond that) addiction to the visual of any kind.

After all, this fetishization, present in all three titles, comes against the backdrop of social anxieties specific to the American milieu of the period. The vulnerability of privacy in the face of exponentially expanding technology and government and corporate manipulation, the Cold War crisis and the emerging rift between what was perceived (and imagined) as an era of post-war prosperity, liberalization of minorities and women's rights, and urban violence, the emergence of counterculture, and the division among the population that the Vietnam War created.[45] All of this weaves into the undercurrents of the novels discussed above, providing a story of the American crisis of the second half of the twentieth century, treated in a satirical manner typical of postmodernism and its globalized effect.

The world's literary system is at the present moment far too complex and fragmented to speak of a centre. Thus, it is becoming increasingly difficult to refer to a single text as "sacred" or paradigmatic for a national culture at a given historical moment. In the constellation of literary genres that are asserting themselves and have asserted themselves over time, the American maximalist novel, as discussed in the pages above, is, however, effectively struggling to assert itself and proliferate at an international level.

In this text, I have shown how, starting from the anxiety of the cultural legitimization of the United States, to the dream of a Great American Novel that has modified its stakes and practices throughout history, American literature has proposed, at least in the second half of the twentieth century, three writers representative of what can be called today the maximalist novel. At many points, the definition of the maximalist novel meets that of the Great American Novel, these works managing to legitimize a kind of fascination that seems strange in an age of globalization and perpetual acceleration, given the size and complications of each.

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[41] Buell, *Great American Novel*, 424.
[42] Weisenburger, Gravity's Rainbow *Companion*, 3.
[43] Catherine Morley "Excavating 'Underworld', disinterring 'Ulysses' Don DeLillo's dialogue with James Joyce", *Comparative American Studies An International Journal*, 4:2 (2006): 175-196.
[44] See Kathleen Fitzpatrick, *The Anxiety of Obsolescense: The American Novel in the Age of Television* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2006).
[45] Buell, *Great American Novel*, 424.

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NAVIGATING DUAL HERITAGE: RUSSO-UKRAINIAN IDENTITY NARRATIVES IN LUH/GANSK

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Rezumat: Acest articol oferă o analiză istorică a conflictului ruso-ucrainean din regiunea Luhansk, focalizându-se asupra complexităților identității naționale, apartenenței culturale și politicilor memoriei. Este o incursiune în contextul cultural al regiunii, explorând provocările tranziției postcomuniste și eforturile autorităților locale de a perpetua narațiunile memoriei sovietice în dorința de a se îndepărta de încercările statului ucrainean de a construi sau a impune o identitate națională ucraineană unică în detrimentul grupurilor entice. Dincolo de informații factuale, articolul ridică întrebări pertinente privind noțiunea „celuilalt" în contextul națiunilor cu diverse etnii. Drept studiu de caz, examinăm documentarele postsovietice despre organizația antifascistă Tânăra Gardă din Krasnodon din perioada celui de-al Doilea Război Mondial, trasând corelații cu războiul ruso-ucrainean.

Abstract: This paper seeks to provide a historical analysis of the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian conflict in the Luhansk region, focusing on the complexities of national identity, cultural belonging, and policies of memory. It explores the historical context of the area, the challenges of the post-communist transition, and the efforts of the regional authorities to perpetuate Soviet memory narratives. This was an attempt to drift apart from the Ukrainian state's attempts to construct or impose a singular Ukrainian national identity upon various ethnic groups. In addition to presenting factual information, the paper will raise pertinent questions regarding the notion of "otherness" in ethnically diverse nations. As a case study, it will examine post-Soviet documentaries that address The Young Guard, a youth-led underground anti-fascist movement in Krasnodon during World War II, while drawing connections to the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war.

Cuvinte-cheie: moștenire duală, identitate regională, narațiuni identitare ruso-ucrainene, regiunea Luhansk, documentare postsovietice, Tânăra Gardă.

Keywords: dual heritage, regional identity, Russo-Ukrainian identity narratives, Luhansk region, post-Soviet documentaries, The Young Guard.

Introductory thoughts

This article investigates the formation of national identity through historical and contemporary lenses in the Luhansk (Ukrainian) / Lugansk (Russian) region, which serves as the backdrop for the ongoing Ukraine-Russia War[1]. It addresses critical issues such as the political development of this area, the transition following communism, and the difficulty of the Ukrainian state to establish a national identity that resonates with the Russian minority living within its borders. Consequently, the article delves into the challenges associated with the political management of ethnic *otherness* in the context of nation-building as well as the complexities involved in creating a national "way of being" within the cultural landscape. To further illuminate the intricacies of existence within the Ukrainian context, we analyse the narratives presented in several post-Soviet documentaries that focus on a clandestine resistance group known as The Young Guard, which emerged during the Nazi occupation of Ukraine in World War II.

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[1] See also O. Grădinaru, "The Discourse of Russo-Ukrainian Identity in the Luhansk / Lugansk Region" in *Ways of Being in Literary and Cultural Spaces*. Edited by Leo Loveday and Emilia Parpală (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), 66-79.

Initially, we would point out the title of this article and the inherent duality of identity in the Luh/gansk region. In reality, the Russo-Ukrainian identity in this currently disputed area of Ukraine does not solely pertain to national identity; rather, it is linked to a particular political stance towards Russians as a minority in territories that were once part of the now-defunct Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. This situation is closely tied to the early Soviet policy of *korenizatsia*, which aimed to promote local languages in public life and is often translated as "indigenization" (literally meaning "putting down roots"). This policy was strategically designed to counteract the enforced russification implemented by the former Russian Empire. While the indigenization initiative was a significant component of socialism, it paradoxically contributed to the dissolution of the Soviet Union. It hindered the ability of former Socialist Republics to develop a cohesive and fair national unification strategy.

Following Ukraine's independence in 1991, the governing authorities initiated a revival of the Ukrainization policy, which drew upon the Soviet practice of *korenizatsia* or indigenization. This revival involved promoting the use of the Ukrainian language while systematically diminishing the presence of Russian, which was gradually phased out of educational institutions, government operations, and media outlets.

The process of identity formation, as Stuart Hall warns,[2] is not a stable or cohesive force in our rapidly evolving world; rather, it is characterized by increasing fragmentation, shaped by diverse, often conflicting, and intersecting influences. This fragmentation is a consequence of the postmodern "disruption of identity",[3] which leads to both local and global disintegration, prompting a reevaluation of the nation-state and fostering new interpretations of individual identity within that context. Additionally, the forces of globalization and competition among various economic and political entities result in the reconstruction of identities in ways that differ significantly from previous eras.[4] As a consequence, the destabilization of established old identities may occur alongside the intensification of emerging marginal identities.

The interplay between cultural and linguistic ethnicities, as well as the dynamics between dominant groups and minorities within a nation-state, has emerged as a significant focus for both academic inquiry and political discourse. The term Russo-Ukrainian identity is utilized in this context to reflect the historical coexistence of Russians and Ukrainians, along with their respective languages,[5] particularly in the Luhansk region. This territory serves as a crucial element in the formation of both historical and contemporary identities,[6] which are often invoked in arguments for autonomy or territorial revision, alongside various contested historical narratives. The linkage of cultural and linguistic identity to territorial claims of separatism can provide an ideological foundation for ethnic minorities.

Additionally, this rationale confers a sense of historical distinctiveness upon these groups, offering ideological support for aspirations to reunite with a perceived ancestral homeland. To thoroughly examine the theoretical dimensions of this complex issue, it is essential to explore two prominent frameworks of nationality: the "civic" and "liberal democratic" approaches, contrasted with the "Romantic" and "organic" perspectives. The former, which emerged from the French Revolution, is associated with concepts of "citizenship" and "popular sovereignty," viewing nations as political entities formed by individuals who voluntarily associate. In contrast, the latter perspective, rooted in the ideas of Herder and the German Romantics, underscores the ancestral and historical foundations of national identity. Scholars have noted a fundamental opposition between these two viewpoints: the liberal democratic ideals prevalent in Western thought stand in stark contrast to the

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[2] S. Hall, "Ethnicity, Identity and Difference". In *Becoming National* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 340-341.

[3] Stuart Hall recognizes the contributions of Marx, Freud, Saussure, and Nietzsche as pivotal in disrupting identity. Their ideas have significantly influenced intellectual discourse, leading to a reconfiguration of the very understanding of identity itself.

[4] In this context, it is pertinent to examine the Commonwealth of Independent States, the European Union, and the emerging Euro-Atlantic Union.

[5] The 2001 census indicated that the Donetsk oblast comprised 56.9% Ukrainians and 38.2% Russians, with 74.9% of the population using the Russian language, whereas 24.1% spoke Ukrainian.

[6] See more in L. Malkki, "National Geographic: The Rooting of Peoples and the Territorialization of National Identity among Scholars and Refugees", In *American Anthropological Association* (1992), 24-44.

emphasis on land and lineage characteristic of the German political tradition, which can be seen as a conceptual and political response to the French Revolution. A notable simplification of this dichotomy is Hans Kohn's classification of the contrasting notions of "nation" into "Western" and "Eastern" as well as "left" and "right."[7]

Antony Smith conceptualizes a nation as both a political and intellectual construct, as well as a genuine historical process.[8] Central to this notion is the existence of a common language, referred to as a "national tongue," which serves as a medium for articulating a "national culture" and "national history." This linguistic unity is crucial for fostering a sense of belonging. However, in certain societies, which Smith designates as lateral ethnies, this sense of belonging may be weakened or even eradicated due to significant dialectal diversity, varying religious beliefs, historical divisions, and the influence of external factors.

Scholars diverge in their interpretations of nationalism. Some, like Hayes,[9] regard it as an intellectual construct primarily associated with prominent thinkers of the past, while others critique the idealistic narratives presented by European nationalist movements. Marxist historians, such as Kedourie,[10] propose a reexamination of nationalism, advocating for its deconstruction. Gellner[11] posits that nationalism is a sociological necessity, whereas citizenship represents the "moral membership of a modern community."[12] Over the past five decades, a multitude of theories and concepts related to "nation" and "nationalism" has emerged, offering insightful critiques concerning ethnic, regionalist, and nationalist issues. The notion of a "national language" has become a contentious topic, intricately linked to various aspects of national culture, including literature, music, visual arts, theatre, traditional attire, and customs. These elements may represent carefully curated and disseminated characteristics of a national state, shaped by creative, political, and cultural imagination.

From this viewpoint, the minor nationalities of Eastern Europe have frequently been relegated to mere theoretical constructs. In certain instances, they have lacked a unified ideology of nationhood, relying instead on cultural elements to foster a sense of national identity, particularly through the intricate development of a so-called myth of ethno-national origins. National identity has often been contrasted with the prevailing ethnicity of a specific region, leading to a rise in political movements advocating for national minorities after the First World War, largely driven by aspirations for cultural autonomy where language, religion, and customs are of paramount importance. A historical perspective is crucial for understanding the evolution from a singular ethnic identity to a unified national consciousness, from cultural autonomy to political aspirations, or, in this context, from separatist ambitions within a nation-state to a desire for re-unification with what is perceived as the Motherland.

Paradoxically, the Soviet Union implemented a coherent and pragmatic strategy for fostering nationalism in the fragmented Ukrainian territories by promoting a national language and enhancing ethno-national consciousness. Following its dissolution in 1991, Russian minorities in Eastern and Southern Ukraine continued to assert their identity. This sentiment was fuelled by an unstable economic situation and controversial debates over adopting a pro-European stance.[13]

Ukrainian nationhood

A comprehensive historical examination of the Ukrainian region necessitates an exploration of the initial state of the Eastern Slavs, known as Kievan/ Kyivan Rus, which served as the progenitor of contemporary Russians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians. Vasily Klyuchevsky, a distinguished historian and professor at Moscow University, was a key figure in the introduction of that term in its contemporary context. His renowned lectures originated in the 1880s, primarily using the terms

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[7] H. Kohn, *Nationalism, Its Meaning and History* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1955).

[8] A. Smith, "The Origins of Nations". In *Becoming National* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 106-125.

[9] C. J. H. Hayes, *Essays on Nationalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1966).

[10] E. Kedourie, *Nationalism* (London: Hutchinson, 1960).

[11] E. Gellner, *Thought and Change* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964).

[12] Gellner, *Thought and Change,* 152.

[13] R. Menon and E.B. Rumer, *Conflict in Ukraine: The Unwinding of the Post-Cold War Order* (Boston Review Originals, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2015), 7–8.

"Kievan Rus" and "Volga Rus" to differentiate between historical eras. Over time, his successors altered this designation, leading to the formal adoption of the term "Kyivan Rus" as the principal name for Ancient Rus (e.g. in the influential works of prominent Soviet historian Boris Grekov during the late 1930s).[14] This change aligned with the Soviet Union's unique interpretation of political correctness, as incorporating the name of the capital of Soviet Ukraine into a historical context was deemed entirely appropriate. "Kyivan Rus" is a geopolitical concept, after all, designating the "Ancient Rus."

Thus, "Kyivan Rus" referred to the period of the 9th-13th centuries in the territory that includes the modern regions of Ukraine - Kyiv, Zhytomyr, Cherkasy and Chernihiv regions. Feudal principalities were allied or dependent on Kyiv; this power expanded to the east, into modern Russia. This 8th-century kingdom, governed by the Rurik dynasty, underwent numerous territorial transformations throughout its existence, particularly during the Mongol invasion in the mid-13th century, which precipitated its fragmentation into various principalities.[15] These principalities came under the influence of multiple powers, including the Ottoman Empire and Austria-Hungary. In the 17th and 18th centuries, a Cossack Republic emerged and thrived, but it was ultimately partitioned between Poland and the Russian Empire, eventually fully assimilating into Russia. The western and central regions of present-day Ukraine were incorporated into the Principality of Galicia-Volhynia, which was once part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania while the Eastern territories fell under the control of the Muscovite Grand Dukes.

This historical context marks the beginning of Ukraine's complex narrative, with the term "Ukraina" literally translating to "on the edge" or "borderland".[16] The designation Kyivan Rus emerged in the 19th century, referencing the era when the Slavic state centred around Kyiv; however, contemporary Russian historians and politicians often refer to it as the "Old Russian State" or *Drevnerusskoe gosudarstvo*. As Serhii Plokhii mentioned, the debate about the origins of the Rus` princes expanded to the Russo-Ukrainian legacy of Kyivan Rus.[17] Additionally, the term *Malorossiya*, meaning "Little Russia", was utilized to describe Ukrainian territories during the Tsarist era and continues to be used anachronistically by Russians, alongside the term "New Russia" or *Novorossiya*, which referred to a significantly larger region from 1764 to 1873 than what is recognized today.

The First World War marked a significant period in Ukrainian history, characterized by the emergence of several republics. Among these was the ephemeral Ukrainian People's Republic established in 1918, which was subsequently succeeded by the anti-Bolshevik Hetmanate, also short-lived, collapsing within the same year. Following this, the Directorate, a provisional revolutionary state committee of the Ukrainian People's Republic, was formed and persisted until 1920. In contrast, the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (Ukrainian SSR), founded in 1919, proved to be more enduring, lasting until 1991. Meanwhile, the Western regions of Ukraine, specifically Galicia and Volhynia, fell under Polish governance as stipulated by the Peace of Riga, while the Soviet Union gradually asserted control over the various Ukrainian republics. Despite Ukraine's designation as a founding member of the Soviet Union in 1922, internal conflicts arising from ethnic, religious, and political identities frequently clashed with Russian hegemony. Notably, the Donetsk-Kryvyi Rih Area, which sought independence and recognition in 1918, established its capital in Kharkiv and later in Luhansk. This region's quest for autonomy is echoed in the contemporary separatist movements within the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian conflict.

The Russian populace, sharing a common cultural heritage and being the dominant Slavic group with minimal foreign influence, has historically demonstrated a desire to restore the former glory of this Slavic state. This aspiration was particularly evident during the Soviet period which significantly shaped Ukraine's modern boundaries which are the source of complex geopolitical issues.

The subsequent analysis will focus on the Soviet approach to nation-building, or *national'noe stroitel'stvo*, particularly regarding its impact on the development of Ukraine, with an emphasis on the

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[14] B. Grekov published his seminal books "Kievan Rus" (1939) and "The Culture of Kievan Rus" (1940).

[15] A. Reid, *Borderland: A Journey Through the History of Ukraine*. Revised and updated edition (New York: Basic Books, 2015)

[16] Reid, *Borderland...,* 1-23

[17] S. Plokhy, *The Gates of Europe. A History of Ukraine* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 41

region known as "New Russia", which currently serves as a battleground in the Russo-Ukrainian military conflict. A core tenet of Marxism-Leninism was the endorsement of nationalism and the appreciation of ethnic diversity, particularly during the years 1928 to 1932. Consequently, each Soviet Socialist Republic was encouraged to celebrate and cultivate its unique ethnic characteristics in aspects such as culture, history, literature, and language. Yuri Slezkine[18] characterizes this phenomenon as "the most extravagant celebration of ethnic diversity," which he deems a "sacred principle of Marxism-Leninism," leading to a situation where the Soviet regime exhibited signs of "chronic ethnophilia." The metaphor articulated by Iozas Vareikis and Isaak Zelenskii[19] aptly depicts the early USSR as a vast communal living space, comprising "national state units, various republics, and autonomous provinces" that functioned as "separate rooms," yet notably excluded a designated space for the Russians. This policy of indigenization stemmed from the belief that the populations of the former Russian Empire did not qualify as nations in the Marxist sense and required assistance in their transition from feudalism to communism.

Additionally, a missionary fervour underpinned this policy; communist propaganda aimed to reach the diverse ethnic groups within the USSR through their native languages. Thus, it became imperative to tailor the principles of the Russian Revolution to local and national circumstances, with local party leaders tasked with their promotion. As Slezkine[20] articulates: "According to Lenin's paradox, the surest way to unity in content was diversity in form." As a result, the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic endorsed linguistic and cultural diversity among the peoples of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, with the expectation that this would ultimately foster the emergence of a unified culture.

In the context of Ukraine, one potential avenue for advancement lay in the intentional promotion of its national language and literature, and the formulation of a cohesive national history. The implications of such an initiative were anticipated during the tenth congress of the Russian Communist Party in 1921, which noted: "Despite the continued dominance of the Russian population in Ukrainian urban centres, it is evident that these cities will gradually undergo a process of Ukrainianization."[21] Nevertheless, the challenge of ethnic fragmentation remained, exacerbated by the influx of Russians following the catastrophic "extermination by hunger" policy (1932–1933)[22], which led to urban areas adopting Russian as the primary language while rural regions retained Ukrainian, ultimately resulting in a divided and conflicting sense of identity.

The Soviet indigenization initiative faced obstacles due to the presence of "denationalized" groups, including Russian-speaking Ukrainians and Ukrainian-speaking Moldavians, as well as mixed dialects that emerged between Russian and Belarusian, and Russian and Ukrainian. A movement encouraging ethnic minorities to master their native languages according to strict grammatical rules and high literary standards, which even included efforts to reduce the influence of Russian terms, was prominent until the educational reforms of 1959. The imposition of the Cyrillic script from 1937 to 1939 marked the onset of a significant Russification campaign, with Russian being established as the Soviet lingua franca and a mandatory second language in educational institutions from 1938 onward.

The nationalism espoused by Russian Soviets diverged significantly from that promoted by Ukrainian nationalists and the intelligentsia, who expressed hesitance towards collectivization, industrialization, and the enforced doctrine of socialist realism. This dissent was categorized as "bourgeois nationalism" and deemed a thought crime, subject to severe repercussions. During the brutal Stalinist purges between 1936 and 1938, numerous Ukrainian artists and writers fell victim to

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[18] Yu. Slezkine "The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism." In Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny. (eds), (1996), 203.

[19] I. Vareikis, I. Zelenskii, *Natsional'no-gosudarstvennoe razmezhevanie Srednei Azii* (Tashkent: Sredne-Aziatskoe gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1924), 57.

[20] Yu. Slezkine, 1996, 207.

[21] Yu. Slezkine, 209-210.

[22] The event referred to as Holodomor in Ukrainian history represents a deliberately orchestrated famine intended to diminish the Ukrainian populace. Since 2004, some historians have characterized this tragedy as a genocidal act perpetrated by Stalin, resulting in the deaths of an estimated 2 to 7.5 million Ukrainians (see also D.R. Marples, *Heroes and Villains: Creating National History in Contemporary Ukraine* (Budapest: Central University Press, 2007), 50.

these repressions, later memorialized as part of the "Executed Renaissance."[23] Concurrently, certain regions within the Soviet Republics, such as the Donbas in Ukraine[24] and Transdniestria[25] in the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic, underwent strategic industrialization.

Initially, the culture, identity, and language of non-Russian ethnic groups were genuinely appreciated; however, the Russian national identity was largely overlooked until the 1930s, largely due to its ties with the Orthodox Church[26] and the legitimacy of the Tsarist dynasty, which was deeply ingrained in the Russian psyche[27]. The borderlands adjacent to the Russian Soviet Socialist Republic were deemed insignificant as long as Russian individuals were afforded the highest status within the so-called Soviet "fraternity of peoples" or *druzhba narodov*.

In 1954, the Soviet Autonomous Republic of Crimea was transferred to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic by Nikita Khrushchev, the Soviet Prime Secretary of Ukrainian descent. This transfer commemorated the Pereyaslav treaty of 1654, which established a relationship between the Ukrainian Cossack state and Moscow, later known as Tsarist Russia. To this day, pro-Russian parties and activists in Ukraine commemorate this event, advocating for the unity of Eastern Slavs, which includes Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians. This aspiration to unify all Eastern Slavs under a shared cultural and political framework resonates with the concept of Great Russia, as articulated by the religious and political philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev. Furthermore, it is intricately linked to the Soviet narrative of a "great family"[28] and the ongoing efforts to reclaim either Soviet or Russian Imperial territories, aimed at establishing a "security architecture" in the post-Soviet landscape.[29]

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, which was founded on the principles of internationalism while paradoxically recognizing various nations, the collective identity of former Soviet citizens has undergone significant transformation, if not fragmentation. Additionally, the reconfiguration and expansion of the European Union, the rise of ethnic, local, and regional claims with national aspirations, the emergence of mass entertainment cultures in the public domain, and other factors have all contributed to a theoretical re-evaluation of national identity within sovereign states. As Hroch notes, nations that emerged from the collapse of authoritarian Communist regimes often lack adequate experience in civil society and tend to leverage existing cultural and linguistic tensions as proxies for articulating political demands.[30]

The Soviet era indisputably played a significant role in the development of Ukrainian nationalism, particularly through its socialist elements. Additionally, the policy of Ukrainianization fostered a degree of coherence and unity at the administrative level, if not at the national level. Nevertheless, the post-1990 Ukrainian nation-state has struggled to effectively address the religious and ethnic diversities present within its territory. The persistent separatist movements, notably in 1918 and 2014 within the Donets Basin, reveal entrenched social and political rifts as groups seek to assert a distinct regional/collective identity and claim recognition as autonomous entities. The dynamics of

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[23] Yu. Lavrinenko, *Rozstrilyane vidrodzhennya: Antologia 1917–1933* (Kiiv: Smoloskip, 2004).

[24] Donetsk and Lugansk oblast in Ukraine and Rostov oblast in the Russian Federation.

[25] Known as Transnistria or Pridnestrovie, this region declared itself a republic in 1990, functioning as a separatist territory within the contemporary Republic of Moldova. It originated from the broader Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, which was established in 1924. In 1940, Soviet authorities incorporated six of the fourteen counties into Bessarabia, contributing to the formation of the Moldavian SSR, while the southern portion of Bessarabia was allocated to the Ukrainian SSR.

[26] Smith highlights the significance of organized religion in the formation of "demotic" or "vertical" ethnic identities, including those of Jews, Poles, Greeks, and Russians. These religions, characterized by their sacred texts, rituals, and customs, play a crucial role in preserving social connections and traditions within communities, thereby facilitating the shift toward civic nationhood (See Smith, "The Origins of Nations,"117)

[27] See also O. Grădinaru, "The Russian Idea–Binder between the National Ideology and Mentality." In *Promemoria* (Chişinău: Integritas, 2011), 257–264.

[28] K. Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual.* Third edition. (Indiana University Press: Bloomington and Indianapolis, 2000), 114-124.

[29] M. Slobodchikoff, *Building Hegemonic Order Russia's Way: Order, Stability and Predictability in the Post-Soviet Space (*London: Lexington Books, 2014).

[30] M. Hroch, "From National Movement to the Fully-Formed Nation. The Nation-Building Process in Europe." In *Becoming National*, edited by Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 72.

both internal and external relationships have proven to be a considerable challenge for an independent Ukraine. While the Eastern regions often view integration with the European Union as contrary to their identity and aspirations,[31] the Western ones are eager to distance themselves from their historical ties with Russia. Disillusioned by the ongoing process of Ukrainianization and the superficial treatment of ethnic identities during the Soviet period, the nation-state appears to have prematurely celebrated its newfound independence, neglecting to resolve the deep-seated tensions that have persisted between its Eastern and Western parts over time.

Memory and Myth: 'The Young Guard' in Post-Soviet Documentary Discourse

In shaping individual comprehension and identity, as articulated in Habermas's notion of the public sphere, this study proposes an examination of post-Soviet documentaries concerning The Young Guard organization in the Krasnodon region during World War II. We regard this documentary output as a significant indicator of the identification processes occurring in post-Soviet Ukraine, particularly within the Novorossiya area. Notably, these documentaries emphasize a heroic Soviet narrative from World War II, which served as a foundational inspiration for Aleksandr Fadeyev's historical novel *The Young Guard*, as well as its Soviet film adaptations released in 1948 and revised in 1964.

The glorified and mythologized account of The Young Guard organization has spurred numerous documentaries both during the Soviet period and following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991.[32] The act of commemorating World War II events transcends a purely post-Soviet context, aligning with what is referred to as the "aesthetics of post-history." However, a distinctive characteristic of these documentaries is their reliance on an expansion of Soviet-era rhetoric surrounding heroes, heroic deeds, and events imbued with a sense of heroism. This endeavour to recall the recent past simultaneously serves as a means of investigating cultural identity, indirectly interrogating the effectiveness of the newly established political framework in post-Soviet Ukraine— whether pro-Russian or pro-European—and seeking to ascertain the true identity of the local populace in relation to, and in contrast with, the dominant Ukrainian identity. The transitional period necessitated a profound reassessment and reevaluation of historical narratives, events, and figures, which aligns with what Boris Buden describes as the objectual culture of remembrance.[33] While numerous instances of a unique objective postmodern discourse regarding the communist era exist, characterized by a reimagined visual representation, it is important to acknowledge a notable ideological stagnation in these documentaries, with only a few exceptions.

The objective of these documentary productions appears to be the revival of interest in the recent heroic past among younger generations, who are often captivated by superficial Western figures such as Spiderman and Superman. Additionally, there is a modest inclination to foster a discourse surrounding the identity and uniqueness of the region, deliberately steering clear of the notions of nation-state and national identity. Consequently, what may initially seem like innocuous documentaries focused on the significance of the heroic past have evolved into contentious statements regarding identity.

These documentaries are created to stimulate the interest of younger audiences in local war heroes with whom they can identify. Concurrently, another underlying objective of this narrative is apparent: to forge a historically accurate regional identity and uniqueness, deliberately avoiding terms like "nation-state" and "national identity." This approach effectively turns the media into a contentious instrument for promoting traditional "bonds of fraternity."

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[31] The same concerns are voiced by the separatist Republic of Pridnestrovie/ Transnistria and the Moldavian Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia/ Gagauz-Yeri.

[32] On a comprehensive analysis of the myth of The Young Guard in both Soviet and post-Soviet culture see also O. Grădinaru, "Between Myth and Demystification. Soviet and Post-Soviet Films on the Young Guard Organization". In *Brukenthalia. Supplement of Brukenthal. Acta Musei* (Editura Muzeului Naţional Brukenthal, Sibiu, 2015), 908-921.

[33] C. Nae „Politici ale memoriei în arta Est-Europeană de după 1989" ["Polities of Memory in East-European Art after 1989"]. *Istoria recentă altfel. Perspective culturale [The Recent History Otherwise: Cultural Perspectives]*. (Iasi: Editura Universităţii „Alexandru Ioan Cuza", 2013), 972.

One notable Ukrainian documentary, titled symbolically *I ne v shurf ikh brosali, a v nashi serdtsa* (*They Were Thrown in Our Hearts, not in the Pit*, 2006), serves as a literary and artistic tribute commemorating the 65th anniversary of the heroic deaths of young individuals from Krasnodon during the fascist occupation. The film features young members of the patriotic club "Molodaja gvardija", who speak highly of the anti-fascist organization from 1942, reciting heroic poetry and reflecting on the valorous actions of the past.

The documentary commences with a discourse delivered by a Ukrainian deputy from the Lugansk region, who emphasizes the significance of recognizing the "authentic heroes of World War II" and the responsibility of the older generation to impart genuine values to the youth. This discourse serves as the foundation for a project aimed at patriotic education. The film interweaves scenes from a post-Soviet classroom, where students articulate their perspectives on The Young Guard organization, alongside an interview with the director of The Young Guard Museum, visual representations from the museum, and excerpts from a Soviet film adaptation. It is dedicated to the memory of those who perished while "defending the Fatherland".

The documentary's central argument is articulated by both the museum director and the students, who express sentiments such as, "the heart is heavy without historical memory, leading to an unyielding soul, ultimately resulting in the loss of the Fatherland", and "the narrative shared is not merely historical; it remains relevant today". The call for the younger generation to draw inspiration from the anti-fascist Soviet youth organization appears anachronistic and inappropriate, particularly in the context of a different state, yet these elements reflect a broader trend of constructing an identity that diverges from the Ukrainian national identity.

The film concludes with remarks from A. Ostavlenko, the executive director of the Blagosovest benefactor fund, who underscores the necessity of fostering patriotism and valuing a shared legacy, deliberately avoiding any ethnic, national, or regional distinctions.

In 2010, a Ukrainian documentary titled *Luganschina v litsakh – Molodaja Gvardija* (*Lugansk and Its Faces – Young Guard*) was released, followed by *Molodaja Gvardija – Khranit` vechno* (*Young Guard – Remembering Forever*) in 2012. The former documentary incorporates footage from Soviet-era films that depict significant moments in Soviet daily life, such as electrification and industrialization. It emphasizes that a realistic portrayal of the Young Guard's history does not diminish the valour of their actions against fascist occupiers. The commentary serves to demystify the ideologically charged Soviet imagery and the idealized representations of the German occupation.

The focus of the first documentary is primarily on the activities of the anti-fascist group known as The Young Guard, utilizing archival materials. Hatred emerged as a key motivator against the fascist regime, a sentiment that also drove some Soviet citizens to betrayal, rooted in a fundamental survival instinct. While elements of Soviet patriotic rhetoric can be identified in the narrative surrounding these heroic anti-fascist movements, the narrator asserts that patriotism can be articulated in straightforward terms, devoid of communist ideological connotations: it is the act of resisting an invader in one's home, defending one's homeland, community, family, and self, with a willingness to sacrifice one's life rather than seek mercy.

The second documentary from 2012, directed by Oxana Vlasova, consists of interviews with war witnesses and excerpts from Soviet archives. Although it remains influenced by the Soviet portrayal of heroism, it reflects some shifts introduced by a new generation of researchers, filmmakers, and critics.

The romanticized portrayal of Soviet narratives surrounding these events is highlighted by a correspondent from the newspaper *Pravda*, a romanticism that remained influential for many decades after World War II. Conversely, a director examines the process of mythologizing the history of the Young Guard and the actual historical context. Nonetheless, the genuineness of those heroic deeds and beliefs cannot be altered or diminished by Soviet ideological propaganda. The interest of historians and journalists in the Young Guard organization is noted as a significant conclusion, with the final visuals comprising documents from the Krasnodon archives.

Additionally, another documentary by Ivan Kravchishyn, titled *Molodaja gvardija: schetchik smerti* (*The Young Guard: The Death Counter*), features predominantly Russian-speaking interviewees despite being produced in Ukrainian. This documentary offers a de-heroicized view of

the organization and its activities, addressing the topic of betrayal. It incorporates footage from wartime documentaries, adaptations by Gerasimov, interviews, photographs, and re-enactments.

The final Ukrainian documentary under examination is a concise 23-minute film titled *The Young Guard*, produced to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the deaths of the youth in Krasnodon. This documentary offers a provocative perspective by detailing the experiences of torture while fostering intergenerational dialogue through interviews with both Russian and Ukrainian residents of Krasnodon, focusing on the identity and actions of these Soviet war heroes. The film presents a juxtaposition of viewpoints, contrasting the insights of informed individuals with those of the uninformed. Central to this production is the exploration of the tension between idealized narratives and contemporary realities, particularly the fluidity of the concept of "hero". It reveals that members of The Young Guard are equated with modern heroic figures such as Spider-Man. The museum director emphasizes the importance of instilling a sense of patriotism, irrespective of a state's ideological stance, while also acknowledging the recent and valuable trend of de-heroization over the past two decades.

Further interviews delve into the demythologization and deconstruction of the revered image surrounding the anti-fascist organization in Krasnodon, striving to reconcile the romanticized portrayal found in Fadeyev's novel with the notion of a gang that undermines traditional definitions of "hero" and "heroism". This quest for a relevant discourse for the contemporary generation is pivotal to the documentary, as the elevated discussions of heroism rooted in Socialist ideology resonate little with the new post-Soviet youth, whose national identity appears increasingly ambiguous and uncertain.

Final reflections

The disintegration of the Soviet Union, which had been intricately founded on the principles of internationalism while simultaneously acknowledging the existence of various nations, significantly altered, if not completely dismantled, the collective identity of its former citizens. Additionally, the restructuring and expansion of the European Union, alongside the proliferation of ethnic, local, and regional aspirations intertwined with national ambitions, as well as the rise of mass entertainment cultures in the public domain, have all played a role in the reevaluation and reconceptualization of national identity within the context of the nation-state. Hroch notes that in nations emerging from dictatorial (Communist) regimes, there is often a lack of proper education in civil society, leading cultural and linguistic issues to serve as substitutes for more clearly articulated political demands.[34] The debates and conflicts surrounding linguistic and identity matters intensified following the dissolution of various empires, as dominant nations found themselves relegated to the status of official minorities in newly established nation-states, exemplified by the cases of the Russian, Ottoman, and Dualist Empires, as well as the Soviet Union.

In a swiftly evolving global landscape characterized by shared experiences among the former Soviet republics—such as the emergence of former dissidents as leaders, the presence of bureaucrats from the previous regime, and the rise of new entrepreneurs—the emergence of a novel form of nationalism, particularly ethnic separatist movements, has led to regional instability and, at times, military conflict. While Western nations leverage this phenomenon to expand their influence, former ruling powers seek to reclaim their authority. The movements of minorities in post-Communist states, notably the Russian population in Ukraine, are intertwined with economic crises, a lack of civic and political education, widespread dissatisfaction with governing bodies, and a yearning for past eras.[35]

The Soviet era may have played a significant role in the development of Ukrainian nationalism, particularly through its Socialist elements. The policies of ethnic management and Ukrainianization likely fostered a sense of coherence and unity, albeit more administrative than national. However, since gaining independence in 1990, the Ukrainian state has struggled to effectively address the religious and ethnic diversities present within its territory. Despite being a nation-state, the persistent separatist movements in 1918 and 2014 in the Donetsk region highlight underlying social, political, and identity challenges as well as the emergence of a distinct regional/collective identity seeking recognition as either autonomous or independent. The relationship

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[34] Hroch, "From National Movement…", 72.
[35] Hroch, 75-76.

with both internal and external "Others" has proven complex for sovereign Ukraine; the Eastern part of the country often perceives the EU as a potential adversary, while the Western region strives to liberate itself from what it views as the oppressive influence of Russia. The negative portrayal of the Other in the construction of personal and national identity may have been inadequately addressed, and the discourse surrounding national culture may have been neglected.

The dynamics of the Russian ethnic minority, situated near the Russian Federation, warrant serious consideration, although they do not seem to contribute to a new national identity formation. There is a notable absence of nationalist intellectual movements, mythical narratives, and only a superficial revival of outdated names associated with once Slavic or Russian territories, alongside an externally imposed Russian influence—both economic and political—on the Donetsk region. Conversely, the analysed documentaries, as part of popular culture and the public sphere, reveal a lingering nostalgia for the Soviet past and its associated values. They also present competing narratives regarding the recent political climate in Ukraine, including the prevalence of the Russian language over Ukrainian, the portrayal of a diminished patriotic spirit among once-heroic citizens, and an intense focus on The Young Guard myth. The members of this group are depicted as martyrs in the struggle against Soviet oppression and as pro-fascist figures, thereby illustrating a fragmented Ukraine and a complex, ambiguous national identity.

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B. MISCELLANEA

IS THERE A CULTURAL CLASH INSIDE THE EUROPEAN UNION?
POPULIST APPROACHES TO IMMIGRATION FROM AFRICA AND THE MIDDLE EAST

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Rezumat: Articolul investighează gradul în care excluziunea socială şi etnică, la adresa imigranţilor extra-europeni, constituie premise şi factori favorizanţi pentru expansiunea populismului de extremă dreaptă în Europa. Exacerbarea identităţii locale şi naţionale este o componentă majoră a naraţiunilor extremiste curente privind imigranţii în Uniunea Europeană. Acest studiu comparativ aduce corelaţii ale unor date statistice privind comportamentul electoral şi temele de agendă ale partidelor în alegerile pentru Parlamentul European din 2019, din Franţa, Germania şi Italia, cu scopul de a descrie cultura politică a electoratului de extremă dreapta şi de a formula predicţii asupra evoluţiilor acestor formaţiuni în scrutinul europarlamentar din luna iunie 2024. Concluzia principală afirmă că erorile de gestionare a diversităţii culturale, atât din partea partidelor extremiste de dreapta, cât şi a celor moderate, conduc la conflicte culturale şi polarizare politică.

Abstract: This study aims to investigate to what extent the exclusionary, ethnically oriented attitudes against non-European immigrants are preconditions and incentives for expanding far-right populism in Europe. The emphasis on local and national identity is a major component of right-wing narratives on immigrants in Europe today. This comparative study correlates evidence on electoral behaviour and agenda subjects of parties from France, Germany and Italy regarding the 2019 European Parliament elections to describe the political culture of far-right electoral pools and formulate some predictions for the June 2024 EU elections. The main conclusion states that mismanagement of cultural diversity by both far-right and moderate parties leads to cultural conflict and political polarization.

Cuvinte-cheie: subiect persistent, management cultural, populism de extremă dreapta, polarizare politică.

Keywords: issue salience, cultural management, far-right populism, political polarisation.

The representation of far-right populist organisations at the European level: a contextual-conceptual approach

The convergence between parties and the electorate regarding the main topics of the public agenda is a decisive factor for the continuity of political formations. A party's electoral success and the ability to maintain its own topics on the public agenda depend on its doctrinal identification with the voters' tendencies and preferences.

Most public policies are debated today on a multilevel approach, including their regional and European dimension. These policies are subjected to the polarisation of society, and political radicalism plays a central role in the development of this trend. Moreover, in the competition for political support, the interaction between moderate ideologies and the extremes is more complex.

This study aims to determine to what extent the recent expansion of far-right populist parties in the European Union results from the convergence of the doctrinal discourse with the voters' position on the cultural acceptance of refugees and immigrants. However, EU integration is another issue with great potential on the public agenda. The refugee crisis and, subsequently, the integration of immigrants and asylum seekers are discussed in conjunction with European integration.

We investigated this correlation at the regional level in three countries – France, Germany and Italy. For this purpose, we chose the 2019 European Parliament election due to the extent of changes in the ideological spectrum. The main reason for the regional approach is the specific interactions of

far-right voters with the immigrants in each of the administrative units of these countries. The frequency of contact between autochthonous people and foreigners is an important contributor to the formation of reciprocal attitudes.[1] As pointed out in the European Union's Handbook on Integration for policy- makers and practitioners: "As governments pay increasing attention to the personal dimensions of integration and in particular to the frequency and intensity of social interactions, subjective indicators are growing in importance".[2] Such subjective indicators of migrants' integration are especially perceptions, attitudes and feelings. These can generate voting preferences. More specifically, far-right populists tend to exploit this topic mostly at the local and regional level because of their promotion of "nativism" as opposed to cultural diversity.

The polemic around the assimilation of immigrants and multiculturalism, coupled with European integration, generated social tensions and polarisation. The two issues are also used as electoral topics by parties from the entire political spectrum. Paul Taggart and Benjamin Moffit argue that the instrumentalisation of cultural crises leads to an increase in the popularity of populists.[3] Kaufmann (2018) shows recent European populism stems, first and foremost, from ethnocultural anxiety generated by the lack of contact between the autochthonous people and the non-European immigrants, and contextually those from Syria.[4] A common feature of the actual populist doctrines is the nativist nostalgia coupled with the rejection of foreign cultures.[5] The anti-democratic nature of populism is analysed – in this study – in terms of disrespect for multiculturalism and alternative views.[6]

The cultural dimension of migrants' integration refers to the sensitive and heterogeneous matter of norms and values, as well as the (ethnic and national) identity of both migrants and the receiving societies. It is also a question of what exactly constitutes the core of a host society, as well as its fundamental values, rules, and patterns that the newcomers face.[7] Moreover, the host culture and the migrant culture are not uniform and static, which makes integration even more challenging.[8] Migrant integration involves various individual and institutional actors and is dispersed across many levels of governance.[9]

In the EU countries with a large number of immigrants, the refugee crisis modelled a palette of far-right electoral behaviours from the local to the European level. Territorial identities, which unite individuals belonging to the same language and cultural values and exclude the non–European people, are linked to a set of conservative values as they are stated in the manifestos of the political groups to which the PRRPs (populist radical right parties) belong. The positive evaluation of cultural differences and the idea of multiculturalism are being abandoned in favour of seeking a "shared identity" or even a return to assimilation policies.[10]

Issue salience theories assume that parties attempt to mobilise the electorate by emphasising some issues more than others, and the weight voters attach to a given policy affects their decision at

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[1] Yascha Mounk, *The People vs. Democracy: Why Our Freedom Is in Danger and How to Save It* (Harvard University Press, 2018), 57.

[2] European Commission, *Migration and Home Affairs. Country responsible for asylum application (Dublin Regulation)*, 2004, last modified 23 September 2020, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/common-european-asylum-system/country-responsible-asylum-application-dublin-regulation_en

[3] Paul Taggart (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of Populism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Benjamin Moffit, *The Global Rise of Populism. Performance, Political Style, and Representation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016).

[4] Eric Kaufmann, "Good Fences Make Good Politics," *Foreign Affairs* 97, no 5 (2018): 224-231.

[5] S. Polakow-Suransky, *Go back to where you came from: The backlash against immigration and the fate of Western democracy* (Nation Books, 2017), 57.

[6] Julia Simon. "The crisis discourse's blind spot: EU-level politicization and the endogenization of the migration crisis," *Journal of European Integration* 45, Issue 5 (2023): 711-727.

[7] F. Heckmann, *Integration and Integration Policies. European Forum for Migration Studies* (Bamberg, 2005), 22.

[8] H. Entzinger, R. Biezeveld, *Benchmarking in Immigrant Integration* (Rotterdam: Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2003), 47.

[9] P. Scholten, R. Penninx, "The multilevel governance of migration and integration," in *Integration Processes and Policies in Europe. Contexts, Levels and Actors*, eds. B. Garcés- Mascareñas and R. Penninx (Heidelberg, New York, Dordrecht, London: Springer, 2016), 91-108.

[10] M. Cherti, C. McNeill, *Rethinking Integration* (London: Institute for Public Policy Research, 2012), 17; R. Brubaker, "The Return to Assimilation? Changing Perspectives on Immigration and its Sequels in France, Germany and the United States," in *Toward Assimilation and Citizenship: Immigrants in Liberal Nation–states*, eds. C. Joppke and E. Morawska (Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 35-36.

the ballot box.[11] According to Budge, "saliency-based theory generates three specific sets of expectations concerning party strategic behaviour. These are that: (1) parties structure much of their rhetoric, particularly election rhetoric, in terms of emphases on different topics rather than opposing each other directly on the same topics." This theoretical viewpoint leads to an operational expectation – pure saliency codings adequately characterise party texts; "(2) parties selectively and habitually emphasise certain issue topics compared to others." Thus, there is a continuing association between particular parties and particular issue topics, which shows a consistently heavier emphasis on the same topics in their texts and documents. This contrasts with the range of topics habitually emphasised by other parties and helps to differentiate the various party families (though the different ranges may overlap to some extent; "(3) parties are advantaged when the issues with which they are associated assume more importance in the public agenda – particularly in election campaigns".[12]

Based on the exposed facts, we formulated two questions: What is the specific role of the far-right populists' regional approach in their success at the 2019 European Parliament elections? What is the role played by the issues of immigrants' integration and European integration in the interaction between far-right parties and the electorate?

It is obvious that PRRP leaders promote the superiority of local nativism together with the rejection of multiculturalism. As a result, a significant number of local/regional cores of far-right populism based on cultural segregation emerged in some Western and Southern EU countries. When niche parties, including far-right parties, moderate their policy positions, they do not benefit electorally as much as mainstream parties.[13] Thus, the first research hypothesis is: *The calibration of political discourse at the local level with the voters' preferences provides electoral capital to the far-right populist parties*.

The refugee crisis and, in general, the access of immigrants to Europe have primarily been a regional approach by the PRRPs but are also inevitably connected with the topic of European integration. Despite the changing political landscape, mainstream parties have not reacted. Whereas the far-right immigration agenda has been mainstreamed, albeit with varying electoral success,[14] on the EU issue, mainstream parties have exhibited programmatic inflexibility.[15] European integration is supposed to be a modelling factor of the interaction between the "natives" and the "others". Moreover, manifesto analyses show that mainstream parties attach much less importance to the EU issue than both the far-right and far-left party family and that changes in their EU issue salience have been minor over time.[16] We furthermore posit that far-right parties enjoy an electoral advantage that is specific to the issue of European integration. The second hypothesis emerges from here: The connection between the immigration issue and European integration can increas*e the balance in favour of PRRPs in the future European electoral competition*.

Empirical analyses show that far-right parties can benefit electorally from the EU issue in contexts of high EU polarisation. Eurosceptic voters tend to defect from mainstream to far-right parties,[17] especially when mainstream parties advocate similar positions to each other and are further away from the positions of the far-right.[18] In addition, the literature suggests that EU issue voting

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[11] Ian Budge, "Issue Emphases, Saliency Theory and Issue Ownership: A Historical and Conceptual Analysis," *West European Politics* 38, no 4 (2015): 761-777; J. Dennison, "A review of Public Issue Salience: Concepts, Determinants and Effects on Voting," *Political Studies Review* 17, no 4 (2019): 436–446.

[12] Ian Budge, "Issue Emphases…," 765.

[13] L. Ezrow, J. Homola, and M. Tavits. "When extremism pays: policy positions, voter certainty, and party support in post-communist Europe," *Journal of Politics* 76, no 2 (2014): 535–547.

[14] J. J. Spoon and H. Klüver. "Responding to far-right challengers: does accommodation pay off?," *Journal of European Public Policy* 27, no 2 (2020): 273–291.

[15] R. Bakker, L. Hooghe, S. Jolly, G. Marks, J. Polk, J. Rovny, M. Steenbergen, and M. A. Vachudova, *2019 Chapel Hill Expert Survey*. Version 2019.1, 2019.

[16] D. Braun, S. Popa, and H. Schmitt, "Responding to the crisis: Eurosceptic parties of the left and right and their changing position towards the European Union," *European Journal of Political Research* 58 (2019): 797–819.

[17] S. B. Hobolt, and T. Tilley. "Fleeing the centre: the rise of challenger parties in the aftermath of the euro crisis," *West European Politics* 39, no 5 (2016): 971–991.

[18] Spoon and Klüver, "Responding to far-right challengers…," 280.

takes place both in national and EU elections, and there are similarities in party strategies in both arenas.[19]

Previous data find exclusive regionalists (and therefore nationalists) are deeply concerned with policing the boundaries of their community against a variety of outsiders and are more likely to exhibit xenophobic and racist attitudes.[20] Moreover, it is supposed that exclusive regionalists are less likely to be attached to Europe than inclusive regionalists or exclusive nationalists. Therefore, in terms of individual and collective identification with a regional culture, support for the European integration of refugees is deficient.[21] Culture is not only a soft factor for region branding,[22] but it is also politicised. Exclusive regionalists do not accept and understand the multilevel EU governance; consequently, they cannot achieve a European view of the refugee issue. This happened in the European Parliament, where mainstream parties achieved a common position and imposed their views and policies on refugees.

Far-right populist parties and multilevel politics

I will present the main profile of three main anti-establishment parties' electorate in France (Rassemblement National /National Rally), Germany (Alternative für Deutschland /Alternative for Germany, and Italy (Lega Nord /North League) to explain how these movements created a strong polarisation inside the population of these three states in respect to the refugee crisis. The result was a very solid social nucleus of cultural superiority against non-European refugees. I observed it was then linked to the "European values" in the doctrine of the exemplified parties and also in that of the EP groups to which they are part.

According to Cas Mudde, these are populist radical right parties (PRRP) sharing a core ideology that combines nativism and authoritarianism.[23] Cas Mudde's definition of populism focuses on an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite," and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people.[24] We employ the term far-right to define the group of radical and extreme parties that put forward nationalist solutions to all socio-economic problems.[25]

Recent research affirms that citizens tend to cast their vote for the far-right based on policy considerations, primarily expressed through the issue of immigration.[26] Far-right parties build their public profile around emphasizing extreme positions on the issue of immigration,[27] which is consistent with their core ideology that seeks to preserve the unity, autonomy, and identity of the

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[19] R. Zur. "The multidimensional disadvantages of Centrist parties in Western Europe," *Political Behaviour* 43 (2021): 1755–1777.

[20] J. Citrin, and J. Sides, "More than nationals: how identity choice matters in the New Europe," in *Transnational identities: Becoming European in the EU*, eds. R. K., Herrmann, T., Risse-Kappen, and M. B. Brewer (Rowman and Littlefield, 2004), 161–85.

[21] M. Chacha, "Regional attachment and support for European integration," *European Union Politics* 14, no 2 (2004): 206–227, last modified 8 November 2012, https://doi.org/10.1177/1465116512462910

[22] T. Perrin, "New regionalism and cultural policies: Distinctive and distinguishing strategies, from local to global," *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 20, no 4 (2012): 459–475.

[23] Cas Mudde, *Populist radical right parties in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Cas Mudde, "Three decades of populist radical right parties in Western Europe: So what?," *European Journal of Political Research* 5, no. 1 (2013): 1-19.

[24] Cas Mudde. "The Populist Zeitgeist," *Government and Opposition* 39, no. 4 (2004): 541-563.

[25] S. Vasilopuolou and D. Halikiopoulou, *The Golden Dawn's nationalist solution: explaining the rise of the Far-right in Greece* (Palgrave 2015); Stockemer et al., "Birds of a feather'? Assessing the prevalence of anti-immigration attitudes among the far-right electorate," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 47, no. 15 (2021): 3417.

[26] E. Ivarsflaten, "What unites Right-Wing Populists in Western Europe? Re-examining grievance mobilization models in seven successful cases," *Comparative Political Studies* 41, no. 1 (2008): 23; J. Rydgren, "Immigration sceptics, xenophobes or racists? Radical right-wing voting in six West European countries," *European Journal of Political Research* 47, no. 6 (2008): 737–765; D. Halikiopoulou and T. Vlandas. "When economic and cultural interests align: the anti- immigration voter coalitions driving far-right party success in Europe," *European Political Science Review* 12, no. 4 (2020): 427–448.

[27] S. Wagner, "Euroscepticism as a Radical Left Party Strategy for Success," *Party Politics* 28, no. 6 (2022): 1069–1080.

nation.[28] Voters spontaneously connect far-right parties to this policy issue, and those who are motivated by immigration-related concerns opt for the far-right in the polls on this basis.[29]

Focusing on immigration helps the far-right galvanize support among their core anti-immigrant constituency.[30] Yet, the electoral competition presents a dilemma to these parties: if they moderate their immigration policy, they are likely to be punished by their traditional anti-immigrant electorate. If they continue their focus on extreme anti-immigrant positions, they satisfy their core voting base but risk alienating potential new voters. Nonetheless, the far-right party family has steadily improved its vote share in the past decades across Western Europe.

National Rally/ Rassemblement National

In France, the ascension of far-right populism started both in northern and southern regions. National Rally members use regional culture and identity as political arguments to promote unity but not diversity. They try to transform local specifics into national patterns, and they justify the refusal to accept immigrants in terms of protecting their autochthonous values from outside influence. In June 2018, the party's name changed from National Front to National Rally (Rassemblement National—RN).

National Rally has a decades-long history of Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, racism, and xenophobia. National Rally has enjoyed electoral success locally and nationally, but only partially in the European Parliament. Throughout its history, the party has been dominated by the Le Pen family, especially Jean-Marie Le Pen, a Holocaust denier and apologist of French colonialism, and his daughter, Marine Le Pen, who advocates religious discrimination against Muslims, immigrants, and refugees. She is actually the leader of the organisation.

From the beginning, the speeches of the *Front National* show a very traditionalist tone, which wants society to rest on an order that transcends it and constitutes its foundation. This is a theme likely to attract within the RN those who, close to traditionalism like the Catholic fundamentalists, gravitate in the orbit of the party, just like those who, without denying the Republic, believe in the value of certain more conservative ideas. However, from the RN's point of view, this order is no longer respected, and chaos is now reigning in France.

As Taguieff has shown, the RN proceeds to an "absolutisation of difference," which, in fact, turns out to be a perversion of the recognition of differences (recognition serving here to exclude). Integration into the French nation can only be achieved at the cost of very deep acculturation, which requires the individual to take on a veritable tour de force of identity, so to speak. Thus, in the unlikely event that the RN would take power, it would prohibit dual nationality, a measure included in the party's programs since 1993. It is asserted that "the only procedure for acquiring French nationality now recognised will be naturalisation (…)," thus abolishing the jus soli. Candidates and their minor relatives should also submit to verification, which means "the demonstrated acquisition of the spiritual values, morals, language and customs that are the basis of French civilisation."[31] Following the example of Switzerland, the municipal council of the municipality should issue a favourable opinion.

Typically, support for the RN clusters in the Northern and Eastern regions of Hauts-de-France, Grand Est, and the Mediterranean South-East in Provence-Alpes-Côte-d'Azur (PACA) and Occitanie. In particular, in this region RN has patiently established itself as a force over the course of many years. PACA is composed of six departments: Alpes-de-Haute-Provence, Alpes-Maritimes, Bouches-du-Rhône, Hautes-Alpes, Var and Vaucluse. It includes large cities such as Marseille, Nice and Toulon, as well as those with strong symbolic or cultural significance such as Avignon and Cannes.

Since the early 2000s, electoral support for the FN has decreased in large metropolitan centres. In 2017, the FN vote peaked in peri-urban areas characterised by "multicentricity" i.e. adjacent to larger urban centres and multiple nodes of economic activity and employment, showing a significant drop in support in France's largest metropolitan areas such as Lyon (8.9%), Toulouse (9.4%),

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[28] D. Halikiopoulou and S. Vasilopoulou. "Breaching the social contract: crises of democratic representation and patterns of extreme right party support," *Government and Opposition* 53, no. 1 (2018): 26.
[29] E. Ivarsflaten, "What unites….," 11.
[30] Stockemer et al., "Birds of a feather'?," 3419.
[31] Stockemer et al., "Birds of a feather'?," 110.

Bordeaux (7.4%) and Nantes (7.2%).[32] Marine Le Pen won just 5% of the vote in Paris, compared with 21.3% nationally. This was replicated in the 2019 European elections, with the RN list receiving just over 7% of the vote in the capital city, 10.2% in Lyon and 9.4% in Bordeaux.[33]

Reflecting the drift in RN support away from larger urban centres, and despite the party running across all sectors of the "big PLM three" – i.e. Paris (17 sectors), Lyon (9 sectors) and Marseille (8 sectors) where it needed to be seen – in 2020, RN lists and candidates were found in 301 municipalities with more than 10,000 inhabitants, which compared with 417 in 2014, that is a drop of about 28%. In some cases, the RN's lack of implantation in large urban centres was reflected in the party strategy to run campaigns seeking to unite "small" and mid-sized communes in opposition to the "big" city centre.

In March 2020, PACA had the largest number of RN lists (90), followed by Hauts-de-France. Together, the northern (HDF and Grand Est) and southern (PACA and Occitanie) regions totalled 253 of the 443 lists, representing 57%, a percentage higher than six years earlier when those four regions alone accounted for 51% of all FN lists, further confirming that the party was concentrating on its established areas of electoral strength. Compared with 2014, RN presence was stable or decreased in some of the party's mission priorities, such as Bretagne, Pays-de-la-Loire and Centre-Val de Loire. As was the case six years earlier, the RN campaign largely left aside small villages with fewer than 1,000 inhabitants where the party had no incentive to invest time or financial resources.

In the 2022 general elections, National Rally remained the third party with 17.3%, but it has a spectacular rise compared with the 2017 elections when they gained 8.8%.[34]

These electoral moments have allowed the National Rally to establish itself in the region, securing support, consolidating networks, hiring more employees, attracting volunteers, getting involved with local organisations and establishing a more respectable image.

Alternative for Germany/ Alternative für Deutschland

In Germany, the most visible local support for a far-right populist party is in the Eastern part of the country, for AfD - Alternative für Deutschland. This fact is explainable in the logic of maintaining extremist attitudes in times of communism and after. But immigration as a political subject is also a main reason for this electorate's option. The ideological and economic couple of criteria are at the origins of this political orientation.

In many ways, the AfD has always proven an able shapeshifter. The movement has routinely reinvented itself according to the needs of the day, and its current rise is no exception. AfD has a mixed political evolution, but currently, it has sufficient mass support to be perceived as a threat to democratic values and principles. The immigration issue ensures a constant electoral percentage, apart from the various circumstances influencing voters' preferences. "The AfD benefited from the 2015 refugee crisis and entered Germany's federal parliament with more than 12 percent of the vote just four years after its founding."[35] Then, the mismanagement of the public discourse on the Covid-19 pandemic caused a visible decrease in popularity.

After the end of the pandemic, support for the party increased again. According to a March 2024 survey, German voters show little interest in the EU Parliament elections, but immigration, asylum, and integration policies are the main issues. From this perspective, the far-right has a great advantage.[36]

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[32] Ministère de l'Intérieur et des Outre-mer, "Résultats des élections législatives 2017," last modified 18 June 2017, https://www.interieur.gouv.fr/Elections/Les-resultats/Legislatives/elecresult__legislatives-2017/(path)/legislatives-2017/FE.html

[33] Ministère de l'Intérieur et des Outre-mer, "Résultats des élections européennes 2019," last modified 28 May 2019, https://www.archives-resultats-elections.interieur.gouv.fr/resultats/europeennes-2019/index.php

[34] Ministère de l'Intérieur et des Outre-mer, "Résultats des élections législatives 2022," last modified 19 June 2022, https://www.interieur.gouv.fr/Elections/Les-resultats/Legislatives/elecresult__legislatives-2022/(path)/legislatives-2022/index.html

[35] Michael Bröning, "Why the German far-right is beginning to win," *Journal of Democracy* (July 2023), last modified July 2023, https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/why-the-german-far-right-is-beginning-to-win/

[36] Sabine Kinhartz, "For German voters, immigration is main issue in EU elections," *Deutsche Welle*, last modified 5 March 2024, https://www.dw.com/en/for-german-voters-immigration-is-main-issue-in-eu-elections/a-68989492

In 2017, AfD entered the German Federal Parliament. By 2020, members of the Alternative für Deutschland were present in all regional parliaments in Germany. Initially framed as a Eurosceptic and radical market protest party,[37] the AfD has since morphed into a party with a nationalistic far-right agenda and links to far-right violence and terrorism.[38] The AfD has increasingly promoted an aggressive, racist, anti-migration agenda since 2015, when refugees from Syria and North Africa arrived in Germany. The party and other far-right groups pushed for shifting public discourse, which normalised racist framings. For example, if a member of the AfD was criticized for reproducing racism they would accuse the media and public of being authoritarian and restricting the right of free speech, thereby using victim blaming to give their racist utterances legitimacy. Anti-immigration views are prominent in the party's doctrine, similar to the French National Rally.

A closer look at AfD support at the 2017 parliamentary election – 12.6% nationwide – underlines the rise of the far-right in Germany on the divide between the country's East and West: the party's vote share was 21.9% in Neue Bundesländer, which constitute the territory of the former socialist German Democratic Republic (GDR) – much larger than the already substantial 10.7% in the Alte Bundesländer of former West Germany.[39] Two years after the federal election, in the autumn of 2019, far-right succeeded once again in Eastern Germany: in three regional elections – Brandenburg, Saxony, and Thuringia – AfD ended up second, attracting over 20 % in each vote.[40]

As in the case of National Rally, I identified the rise of AfD as a "populist radical right party"[41] on cultural values as the key explanation. This has mainly meant the prevalence of negative stances on immigration – often in combination with authoritarian attitudes. Indeed, "a host of single-country and comparative studies have demonstrated time and again that anti-immigrant sentiment is the single most important driver of the radical right vote".[42]

The current levels of strong support for AfD in the East are only the tip of the iceberg. Long before the electoral breakthrough of AfD, far-right parties entered Eastern German regional legislatures, even though they failed to establish a permanent presence: the German People's Union (DVU) in Brandenburg (1999–2008) and Saxony-Anhalt (1998–2002); and the National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD) in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania (2006–2016) and Saxony (2004–2014). In the 2019 European Parliament Elections, AfD gained 11% and 11 seats, on the fourth place in the national ranking.[43] In the 2021 Bundestag Election, AfD gained 10.1% and 83 seats.[44]

In the 2023 local elections, AfD gained mayoral posts in towns of Eastern Germany. Two symbolic examples are Raguhn-Jessnitz, a town of 9,000 in Saxony-Anhalt, where the party's candidate, Hannes Loth, won 51.1% of the vote to become the town's mayor. The second example was in Sonneberg, in Thuringia, where Robert Sesselmann, a lawyer and regional lawmaker, won a runoff election for the position of district administrator.[45]

Apart from economic transformation after the fall of the Berlin Wall, migration divides the East and the West of Germany most sharply. The population of Eastern Germany has long been economically and culturally homogenous. During the German Democratic Republic (GDR), strong national identification with Germany was common sense. Similar to many central and eastern European countries, immigration had only been a minor phenomenon in the GDR: unlike the Federal Republic, the GDR did not experience labour migration from southern Europe and Turkey in the

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[37] U. Backes, "The radical right in Germany, Austria and Switzerland," in *The Oxford handbook of the radical right*, ed. J. Rydgren (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2018), 452–476.

[38] AfD Watch Hamburg, "Extrem rechte Aufmärsche," 2019, last modified 26 September 2019, https://afd-watch-hamburg.org/netzwerk/extrem-rechte-aufmaersche/

[39] The Federal Returning Officer, "Bundestag Election 2017," last modified 24 September 2017, https://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/en/bundestagswahlen/2017/ergebnisse/bund-99.html

[40] Ben Knight, "Berlin reacts to far-right surge in eastern elections." Deutsche Welle, last modified 9 February 2019, https://www.dw.com/en/germany-berlin-reacts-to-far-right-surge-in-eastern-elections/a-50256686

[41] Cas Mudde, *Populist radical right parties in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 119.

[42] K. Arzheimer, "Explaining electoral support for the radical right," in *The Oxford handbook of the radical right*, ed. J. Rydgren (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2018), 143-165.

[43] H. Schmitt, S. B. Hobolt, W. van der Brug, and S. A. Popa, "European Parliament Election Study 2019, Voter Study." GESIS, Cologne, 2019. ZA7581 Data file Version 2.0.1, last modified 1 April 2022, https://doi.org/10.4232/1.13846

[44] The Federal Returning Officer, "Bundestag Election 2021," last modified 11 February 2024, https://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/en/bundestagswahlen/2021/ergebnisse/bund-99.html

[45] Bröning, "Why the German far-right...".

second half of the twentieth century. Instead, the GDR hosted small and rather isolated immigrant communities of contract labourers from socialist "sister countries"- often from outside of Europe, most prominently Vietnam and Mozambique. In 1989, the share of foreigners in West Germany was 8%, while in the east it was only 1%.[46] Today, only about 5% of foreign citizens in Germany live in the east. The share of Muslims is even lower. Hence, the middle-aged and elderly generations in the East have significantly less intercultural experience than their Western counterparts.

These distinct experiences also shape attitudes and seemingly more negative ones. In eastern Germany, 30% do not want a Muslim, and 25% do not want a refugee as a neighbour. In the west, however, support for these discriminatory statements is significantly lower (both at 16%). Interestingly, the low share of immigrants in the east is not necessarily unknown to far-right supporters: surveys of PEGIDA activists have revealed that most of them estimated the share of Muslims in Saxony at 1 or 2%—which is higher than the actual number, but not excessively wrong.

It is the higher prevalence of anti-immigration attitudes in the east that explains the higher likelihood for an AfD vote choice in the region. Anti-immigration stances are important for choosing AfD in both west and east – but they are much more prevalent in the latter, thus contributing to the party's strength. Research also indicates that sharp and sudden increases in the number of immigrants from outside the EU have driven the AfD vote—especially in places where the initial number of immigrants had previously been comparatively small. Hence, the share of the increase in numbers of immigrants rather than high absolute numbers matters for local AfD strength. These findings underline that AfD strongly benefited from long-standing differences between the east and the west related to its core issue, which became particularly salient during the 'refugee crisis' in the mid-2010s.

It is not surprising, then, that anti-establishment attitudes and dissatisfaction with the function of democracy, both particularly prevalent in Eastern Germany, are regularly found to be associated with supporting AfD. Traditionally, Die Linke was able to mobilise on these grounds. Recently, however, a substantial number of eastern German protest voters have turned their backs on Die Linke and embraced AfD.[47] The effects of AfD strength are particularly noticeable at the subnational level, where it strongly limits the government coalition options for other parties.

North League/ Lega Nord

The Lega Nord (LN), whose full name is Lega Nord per l' Indipendenza della Padania, is a radical right, federalist, populist and conservative political party. In the run-up to the 2018 general elections, the party was renamed Lega without changing its official name. Nevertheless, even before the renaming, the party was often referred to simply as "Lega".

The Lega Nord has strong regional support from the developed industrial municipalities. The party could rely on a capillary presence in northern Italy and its own well-established media network to support the initiative. CasaPound Italia, a self-defined fascist social movement, and Front National and Generation Identitaire activists also participated.

In 1989, Lega Nord was founded as a merger of six regional parties from north and north-central Italy (Liga Veneta, Lega Lombarda, Piemonte Autonomista, Uniun Ligure, Lega Emiliano-Romagnola and Alleanza Toscana), which became the founding "national" sections of the party in 1991. The founder and long-time secretary of the party at the federal level was Umberto Bossi, who is now the President of the Swiss Confederation.

The LN long advocated the transformation of Italy from a unitary to a federal state, fiscal federalism, regionalism and greater regional autonomy, especially for the northern regions. At times, the party advocated the North's secession, which the party called "Padania," and consequently Padanian regionalism.

The original manifesto of the party identified "federalist libertarianism" as ideology.[48] In fact, the party has often varied its tone and policies, replacing its original libertarianism and social

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[46] P. R. Ireland, "Socialism, unification policy and the rise of racism in eastern Germany," *International Migration Review* 31, no. 3 (1997): 541–568.

[47] J. Olsen, "The left party and the AfD," *German Politics and Society* 36, no. 1 (2018): 70–83.

[48] F. Jori, *Dalla Łiga alla Lega: Storia, movimenti, protagonisti* (Marsilio, 2009, 1st. ed).

liberalism with a more socially conservative approach, alternating anti-clericalism[49] with a pro-Catholic Church stance and Europeanism with a marked Euroscepticism[50] and ultimately abandoning much of its original pacifism and uncompromising environmentalism.[51]

Similarly to National Rally and Alternative for Germany, Lega Nord has always been opposed to illegal immigration and has often taken Eurosceptic positions, most recently in the Identity and Democracy Group in the European Parliament. The party takes a tough stance on crime, illegal immigration, especially from Muslim countries, and terrorism. It supports the promotion of immigration from non-Muslim countries in order to protect the "Christian identity" of Italy and Europe, which, according to party officials, should be based on "Judeo-Christian heritage."[52] The party has been characterised as "nationalist,"[53] "xenophobic" and "anti-immigration."[54] Lega Nord is now often regarded as a right-wing populist party.[55] Party leaders generally reject the "right-wing" label, though not the "populist" label.[56] Already in 2008, Umberto Bossi explained in an interview that Lega Nord is "libertarian, but also socialist" and that the right-wing ideology he prefers is an anti-statist one with a "libertarian idea of a state which does not weigh on citizens". The anti-immigration position is just as prominent as in the French and German cases.

Regionalism and the defence of northern Italian traditions are pillars of the party's ideology. The LN's historical goal is to transform Italy into a federal state and to provide Padania with more tax revenues within the framework of fiscal federalism. Federalism has become an important issue in the country through the Lega Nord. This is also the main difference between the Lega Nord and most European regionalist parties (South Tyrolean People's Party, Basque Nationalist Party, Republican Left of Catalonia, Scottish National Party, Vlaams Belang and the like), which focus on special rights for their own regions.[57]

From the outset, the party's electorate was very diverse on a left-right scale. In the 1992 general election, for example, 25.4% of party supporters were former Christian Democratic voters, 18.5% Communists, 12.5% Socialists and 6.6% former voters of the post-fascist Italian Social Movement. According to a 1996 Abacus poll, 28.7% of LN voters described themselves as centrist, 26.3% as right-wing and 22.1% as left-wing.

Lega Nord often criticises the European Union (it was the only party in the Italian Parliament, along with the Communist Refoundation Party, to vote against the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe, but it voted in favour of the Treaty of Lisbon) and opposes what it calls the "European superstate," favouring instead a "Europe of the Regions".[58] In particular, under the leadership of Matteo Salvini and the influence of Professor Claudio Borghi, the party has proposed Italy's exit from the euro, although some party heavyweights have spoken out against it, including Flavio Tosi.

However, according to Roberto Maroni, the party is not Eurosceptic and stands for a "new Europeanism". In a public speech in 2012, he said to party activists: "We should start looking at Padania in a Northern, European perspective. The project of Padania is not anti-European, this is a new Europeanism which looks at the future: a Europe of the regions, a Europe of the peoples, a truly federal Europe".

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[49] Patricia Chiantera-Stutte, "Leadership, Ideology and Anti-European Politics in the Italian Lega Nord," in *Challenges to consensual politics: Democracy, identity, and populist protest in the Alpine region*, eds. D. Caramani and Y. Mény (P.I.E.-Peter Lang, 2005), 113-130.

[50] D. Parenzo and D. Romano, *Romanzo Padano* (Sperling and Kupfer, 2008), 113.

[51] G. Passarelli and D. Tuorto, *La Lega di Salvini: Estrema destra di governo* (Il Mulino, 2018), 87.

[52] Lega Nord, https://www.leganord.org/

[53] Cristopher Cepernich, "Digital Campaigning: The Communication Strategies of the Leaders on Facebook," in *The Italian General Election of 2018. Italy in Uncharted Territory,* eds. L. Ceccarini, J. Newell (Palgrave Macmillan 2019), 217-243.

[54] S. Alonso, *Challenging the state: Devolution and the battle for partisan credibility: a comparison of Belgium, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, 1st ed.); D. Art, *Inside the radical right: The development of anti-immigrant parties in western Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 55.

[55] Markus Deggerich, Manfred Ertel, Juliane Von Mittelstaedt, Mathieu Von Rohr, Hans-Jürgen Schlamp, Stefan Simons, "Continent of Fear: The Rise of Europe's Right-Wing Populists." *Der Spiegel*, last modified 28 September 2010. https://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/continent-of-fear-the-rise-of-europe-s-right-wing-populists-a-719842.html

[56] Lega Nord, https://www.leganord.org/

[57] Umberto Bossi, Daniele Vimercati, *Vento dal Nord. La mia Lega, la mia vita* (Sperling and Kupfer, 1992), 37.

[58] Bossi and Vimercati, *Vento dal Nord*, 37.

Support for the Lega Nord varies widely even within Padania and has fluctuated over time. At the 2008 general election, Lega Nord scored 8.3% at the national level, slightly below the result of 1996: 27.1% in Veneto, 21.6% in Lombardy, 13.0% in Friuli-Venezia Giulia, 12.6% in Piedmont, 9.4% in Trentino-Alto Adige, 7.8% in Emilia-Romagna, 6.8% in Liguria, 2.2% in the Marche, 2.0% in Tuscany and 1.7% in Umbria.[59]

At the 2010 regional elections, the party gained 35.2% of the vote in Veneto, 26.2% in Lombardy, 16.7% in Piedmont, 13.7% in Emilia-Romagna, 10.2% in Liguria, 6.3% in the Marche, 6.5% in Tuscany and 4.3% in Umbria. At the 2014–2015 regional elections, it obtained 40.9% in Veneto, 20.3% in Liguria, 19.4% in Emilia-Romagna, 16.2% in Tuscany, 14.0% in Umbria and 13.0% in Marche, marking its best results so far in those six regions.

The 2013 general election was not a good moment for the party, which gained meagre results, e.g. 12.9% in Lombardy and 10.5% in Veneto. Five years later, the party obtained its best results so far in the 2018 general election: 17.4% in Italy, 32.2% in Veneto, 28.0% in Lombardy, 26.7% in Trentino, 25.8% in Friuli-Venezia Giulia, 22.6% in Piedmont, 20.2% in Umbria, 19.9% in Liguria, 19.2% in Emilia-Romagna, as well as significant results in the South (5–10%).

In the 2022 general election, Lega gained only 8.9% and remained in the centre-right coalition.[60] The party's popularity is decreasing due to the inconsistency of its public agenda. Lega tends to become a catch-all party and embraces a legalist approach to issues such as immigration and the public education system for immigrants.

The comparative analysis of the three far-right parties regarding the position towards refugees and immigrants demonstrates that the most efficient way of ideological exploitation of the subject, and implicitly electoral, is at the local and regional levels. Cultural superiority is highly and constantly promoted by all studied parties.

Research design and methodology

The research consists of data correlations that verify the two hypotheses. None of these correlations is high enough to be considered problematic for the analyses we present below.

For the first hypothesis, we used the comparative method to highlight the similarities between the percentage of immigrants per administrative unit (region) in each of the three countries (independent variable), and the percentage of votes gained by each of the populist parties at the regional level (dependent variable).

We chose these countries because of relevant similarities related to immigrant policies and a long history of far-right parties' development. These are preconditions for validating or invalidating the hypothesis. France, Italy, and Germany are classical case studies for the resilience of far-right populism. They have a long post-war history of the emergence and development of right-wing movements and parties that modelled political culture.

We also focus on these countries because, as evident in the literature discussed, the dynamics of party competition in West and East Europe are different. Specifically, Ezrow, Homola, and Tavits show that while taking moderate positions benefits mainstream parties in Western Europe, extremism is rewarded in post-communist Europe.[61]

The contextual factor introduced in the research is the refugee crisis, which implied a sudden increase in asylum applications in 2015-2016 compared to the previous years. This created a dominant issue on the public agenda of all three countries and generated a profound social change of attitude towards immigrants in general and refugees especially. It is important to mention the main EU immigrant policy – the Dublin III Regulation, which "entered into force in July 2013 and contains sound procedures for the protection of asylum applicants and improves the system's efficiency"; its objective "is to ensure quick access to the asylum procedures and the examination of an application

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[59] P. Corbetta and M. S. Piretti, *Atlante storico-elettorale d'Italia: 1861-2008* (Zanichelli, 2009, 1st. ed), 23.

[60] La Repubblica, "Elezioni Politiche 2022," last modified 28 September 2022, https://elezioni.repubblica.it/2022/elezioni-politiche/

[61] L. Ezrow, J. Homola and M. Tavits, "When extremism pays: policy positions, voter certainty, and party support in postcommunist Europe," *Journal of Politics* 76, no. 2 (2014): 535–547.

on the merits by a single, clearly determined EU country. The Regulation establishes the Member State responsible for the examination of the asylum application".[62]

All three countries had a significant number of immigrants in 2019, and the subject dominated the public and media agenda. In France, the majority of the 5.2 million foreigners in 2019 came from Morocco and Algeria.[63] But the most intense debates, which fuelled public support for the extremists, took place on the topic of Syrian asylum applicants, a number of 102,675. Comparatively 2018, 96,240 applicants were registered; in 2017 - 78,330; in 2016 - 68,980; and in 2015, there were 62,135 requests (Situation of Asylum in the European Union 2019).[64] The trend is increasing from year to year.

In Germany, there were also many asylum applicants, namely 87,600.[65] The year 2018 had 99,225 requests, 2017 - 125,970, 2016 - 476,955, and 2015- 328,340 requests were registered. The trend has decreased since 2016. This country's total number of foreigners was 11,228,300 in 2019, confirming the massive and increasing influx in recent years. The non-European countries of origin of the immigrants are, for the most part, Turkey, Syria, Afghanistan, and India. As in the case of France, foreigners of the Muslim religion and refugees are the target of the public speeches of the far-right populist parties.

In Italy, the total number of foreigners in 2019 was 4,996,158.[66] Most of the immigrants from outside Europe are African (Morocco, Egypt, Nigeria, Senegal, Tunisia). The number of asylum applicants was 37,145, continuously decreasing compared to 2018 (49,750), 2017 (113,340), 2016 (11,785) and 2015 (76,245).

To test the second hypothesis, we used the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) for data about parties' positions and the European Election Studies (EES) for data about voters. These two sources provide a comparable set of positional issue placements for both parties and voters, allowing us to construct a two-dimensional space of party competition in the 2019 EP elections on the regional and European dimensions. We provide empirical support for our theoretical arguments using European Parliament election data. The EES is the only cross-national survey that asks voters to report their positions on immigration and EU integration.

In addition, the literature suggests that EU issue voting takes place both in national and EU elections[67], and there are similarities in party strategies in both arenas.[68] We also admit the possibility that our theoretical arguments are more likely to be supported in the context of EP elections.

Limits

The research is limited to a specific geographical region – and includes France, Germany and Italy. As a consequence, I cannot compare the data obtained with the data from Central and Eastern Europe. However, populist radical right parties in the latter regions are quite different from those in the presented case studies: in Hungary and Poland, there are illiberal parties in power, but these are not included in the PRRP category. These two countries did not confront the refugees because they refused the migration quotas in 2015. As a result of this political decision, the correlation between the number of refugees and the popularity of populists cannot be assessed.

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[62] EU Commission, "Migration and Home Affairs…".
[63] Ministère de l'Intérieur et des Outre-mer, "Les chiffres clés de l'immigration 2021," last modified 6 December 2022, https://www.immigration.interieur.gouv.fr/Info-ressources/Etudes-et-statistiques/Chiffres-cles-sejour-visas-eloignements-asile-acces-a-la-nationalite/Les-chiffres-cles-de-l-immigration-2021
[64] European Union Support Office, "EASO Annual General Report 2019," last modified 9 June 2020, https://euaa.europa.eu/asylum-trends-easo-asylum-report-2020
[65] DeStatis, "Migration and integration. Foreign population by Land and years," last modified 2 May 2024, https://www.destatis.de/EN/Themes/Society-Environment/Population/Migration-Integration/Tables/foreigner-laender-time-serie.html
[66] Tutti Italia, "Cittadini stranieri in Italia – 2019," last modified 1 January 2020, https://www.tuttitalia.it/statistiche/cittadini-stranieri-2020/
[67] C. E. De Vries, "EU Issue Voting: Asset or Liability?: How European integration affects parties' Electoral Fortunes," *European Union Politics* 11, no. 1 (2010): 89–117.
[68] R. Zur, "The multidimensional disadvantages of Centrist parties in Western Europe," *Political Behaviour* 43 (2021): 1755–1777.

The Western and Southern societies are confronted mainly with pressure from immigrants. By comparison, in Central and Eastern Europe, and also in the Balkans, the more dominant issue is the historical minorities' management.

Results

First, I correlated the percentage of immigrants in each region with the voters' percentage of the extremist parties. The objective was to establish if the salience of immigrants' integration issue in the party discourse determines the electoral success of the far-right parties investigated. I used the electoral stats from these countries.

a) Rassemblement National /National Rally (France)

In the case of the National Rally party, the percentage of immigrants from each region is inversely proportional to the percentage of votes it received. Having fewer immigrants in the respective region leads to a greater number of votes. National Rally received 33.55% of votes in Hauts-de-France and 30.52% in Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, respectively; immigrants make up 5.8% and 11.10% of their total votes. The highest proportionality ratios are found in Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, with 9.90% of immigrants and 20.99% of votes, Bourgogne-Franche-Comté with 7.2% of immigrants and 26.26% of votes, and Bretagne with 3.90% of immigrants and 17.32% of votes. In the Île-de-France region, the party received only 14.13 % of the vote, and the percentage of immigrants is the highest among all regions - 20.10.

In the vast majority of regions, the National Rally received high percentages of votes. Interestingly, the highest percentage of votes was obtained in Mayotte - 46.12% - where the French National Institute of Statistics does not provide the number of foreigners. Other non-European departments also had high percentages of votes: La Réunion - 31.24%, Guyana - 27.47, Guadeloupe - 23.71, and Martinique - 16.31%. Anyhow, the data from the former colonies do not affect the statistical logic of the research since only the percentage of immigrants from Europe is taken into account.

b) Alternative für Deutschland/ Alternative for Germany (Germany)

The Alternative for Germany shows the same trend of inverse proportionality between the percentage of immigrants and the percentage of votes at the regional level. However, the correlation is close to the upper limit of the medium level. In descending order of the immigrants' percentage per region, AfD obtained the highest number of votes in Sachsen - 1.92% of immigrants and 25.30% of votes, Brandenburg - 1.17% of immigrants and 19.90 % of votes, Sachsen-Anhalt - 1.03% of immigrants and 20.40% of votes, Thuringia - 1.02% of immigrants and 22.50% of votes, then Mecklenburg-Vorpommern - 0.70% of immigrants and 17.70% of votes. In Nordrhein-Westfalen, which has the highest percentage of immigrants - 24.14%, AfD obtained only 8.5% of votes. In the other states, the percentage of votes is also inversely proportional to that of immigrants.

c) Lega Nord/ North League (Italy)

Compared to the other two cases, Lega Nord shows a stronger relationship of direct proportionality between the percentage of votes and that of immigrants per region. The higher the number of foreigners is, the more votes far-right populists have in the region. In descending order of the immigrants' percentage per region, Lombardy - 43.38% of votes and 22.60% of immigrants, then Lazio - 32.66% of votes and 12.5% of immigrants, Emilia-Romagna - 33.77% of votes and 12.50% of immigrants, followed by Piedmont with 37.14% of votes and 8.20% of immigrants.

The results confirm our first hypothesis. There is a moderate link between the percentage of immigrants in a given region and the percentage of votes for a far-right party. Public support for a party depends on the consistency of its agenda and convergence with the major trends in society. It confirms when a party takes a popular position (i.e., close to a large section of the electorate and distinguishable from the positions of other parties) on an issue, high salience (large negative coefficient) of this issue is associated with a higher probability of voting for that party. This is the case for the integration of immigrants. This topic was dominant in all regions, especially those with far-right supporters.

For the second hypothesis, I correlated the parties' and medium voters' positions on multiculturalism (immigrant integration) and European integration. Evidence comes from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey 2019 and the European Parliament Elections Study 2019.

The Chapel Hill Expert Survey (2019) includes a series of indicators related to the parties' position on economic, political, social and cultural policies. We selected two of them, respectively, the party position on multiculturalism (integration of immigrants and asylum seekers) and on the European integration. These indicators are relevant for the regional approach to immigration (and equally the refugee crisis) by the far-right parties because the parties can choose to adjust their discourse accordingly to their supporters' tendencies in changing their position on the two mentioned topics.

Studies have shown that attitudes towards immigrants and asylum seekers, as well as thoughts about their deservingness, depend on what they think about their characteristics, such as race, background or religion.[69] There is uncertainty about what causes these changes in public opinion regarding asylum seekers. Most likely, these changes are caused by the large, rapid influx of asylum seekers. However, the changes could also have been influenced by the media debate and the way in which the media framed the refugee crisis.

With respect to the party's position on the integration of immigrants and asylum seekers, the National Rally has a score of 10, Alternative for Germany gets 9.95, and Lega Nord has 9.82. These scores show the clear opposition to multiculturalism and the positioning in favour of the cultural assimilation of ethnic minorities.

These indicators confirm the adherence of the three parties to ethnocentrism, cultural uniformity, and traditionalist and conservative values. The respective characteristics are subsequent to political radicalism, which means that the respective parties are not willing to dialogue and come to a democratic compromise. The effect spreads over the receivers of the speech, who tend to adopt closed attitudes towards cultural and ethnic diversity progressively. In turn, these attitudes are expressed by voting.

With respect to the position on the EU integration issue, the National Rally has a score of 8.63, Lega Nord is quoted at 8.37, and Alternative for Germany has 6.71 points. I will suppose this indicator varies not only depending on the party assessment of the immigration issue but also on the people's contextual change of issue importance.

We used the European Parliament Elections Study 2019 to retrieve the median voter's position on both the issues of immigrant integration and EU integration. This data establishes where the median voter is placed on a 0 to 10 scale related to the party's position on the mentioned public agenda topics.

The medium voter's position is much more moderated on the same topics than the parties'. With respect to the integration of immigrants, voters are placed a little over the middle of the scale in the cases of France (6.0) and Italy (5.8), while Germans are placed a little under medium (4.9). Position on the EU integration reveals the medium value for France (5.0) and a unit below average in Italy (4.0). Germany differentiates itself compared to the other two countries, with a value of 3.9.

The combining of obtained data shows that on the issue of immigrants´ integration and asylum seekers all far-right parties are perceived as extreme (over 8.5 on a 0–10 scale), while on EU integration some of these parties are less extreme. This is the case of AfD, which differs from the two other parties by a lower importance given to the EU integration. It also indicates the distance of these parties from the median voter, where, on average, far-right parties are closer to the median voter on the EU dimension than on immigration. Additionally, it shows that the main competition of the far-right on immigration is the major right-wing parties. Far-right parties also tend to take more extreme positions on the integration of immigrants and asylum seekers than on EU integration. On this topic, far-right parties consistently position themselves at the extreme end of the axis. Yet, on the EU integration, they are comparatively less extreme.

The EU issue is unique in the sense that the far-right parties are the only parties to the right of the median voter. They do not encounter serious competition for Eurosceptic votes, and when they do, competition comes from the weaker, low-valence parties of the far left.[70] National Rally and Lega

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[69] K. Bansak, J. Hainmuller and D. Hangartner, "How Economic, humanitarian, and Religious Concerns Shape European Attitudes toward Asylum Seekers," *Science* 354, no. 6309 (2016): 217–222; J. Hainmuller, and M. J. Hiscox, "Attitudes Toward Highly Skilled and Lowskilled Immigration: Evidence from a Survey Experiment," *American Political Science Review* 104, no. 1 (2010): 61–84.
[70] S. Wagner, "Euroscepticism as a Radical Left Party Strategy for Success," *Party Politics* 28, no. 6 (2022): 1069.

Nord successfully associated their extreme position on immigrants with the statement that EU integration is an important issue in the public space. At that moment, Alternative for Germany had a moderate position on the EU integration and they stated it was not a very salient issue. But they gained the most important electoral success at the 2019 European Parliament elections.

The combined results show that, at the 2019 EP elections, the issue of EU integration did not have a leverage effect over the issue of immigrants' integration. These topics were treated separately by the party leaders and the voters. This validates the issue salience theory assumption that changes in the salience of EU integration are likely to be the most electorally beneficial for far-right parties, especially relative to the well-documented importance of immigration. From this perspective, EU integration can be used more contextually and flexibly than immigrant integration. The two topics offer different possibilities of approach. On the EU integration, far-right parties can change their discourse relatively without an electoral risk, but they cannot proceed identically with respect to immigration because of the radical positioning on this issue.

Discussion and conclusions

The 2019 European Parliament elections had the political and cultural imprint generated by the Syrian refugee crisis, the peak of which was reached in 2015-2016. It was the moment when, at the European level, the far-right populist parties exploited the anti-immigrant political discourse to the maximum. The three-year time gap between the massive influx of refugees and the European elections did not greatly mitigate the effects of the politicisation of this multidimensional issue.

This study proposed a specific perspective on the role of the regional approach to populist parties' agenda topics. We analysed two predominant themes in the last decade: the integration of immigrants and European integration. Our research thus confirms that there are various possibilities for the far-right parties to maintain their resilience at the European level through the use of societal resources at the regional level.

We demonstrated the first hypothesis, which says the calibration of political discourse at the local level on the voters' preferences gives electoral capital to the far-right populist parties. Cultural integration of immigrants and the acceptance of multiculturalism remains an important issue, but the populist far-right parties should not absolutize it. On the one hand, radical right parties' position on immigrant integration has a clear and observable influence on the individual's decision to give them their vote. On the other hand, these parties should take into account the salience of their issues on the voters' preferences. The concrete advantages in terms of cultural policies obtained by the voters remain a determining factor for the success of the extremists. However, the electoral space that extremists can use on this topic is limited and contextual because they cannot change the radical discourse without the risk of losing votes.

The dynamics of the ratio between the number of immigrants and the percentage of votes at the regional level is reflected directly at the European level. The studied parties gained seats in the European Parliament using the convergence of their public position on immigration policy and the integration of asylum seekers with the voters' position on these issues. The National Rally won the European Parliament elections in France with 22 seats, and the Lega Nord was also the leader in Italy with 28 seats. In Germany, AfD benefited from a strong rise in 2019 compared to 2014, obtaining 11 % and the same number of seats in the European Parliament, with 4 more than in the previous election in 2014.[71] By comparison, in 2014, the National Rally obtained 20 seats, and Lega Nord had only 5 mandates.

All three cases prove that the anti-immigration position is one of the doctrinal pillars that bring a large number of votes for the far-right populist parties. Thanks to the doctrinal discourse against the access of immigrants to the country, a discourse to which an important part of the population with the right to vote was receptive, the three populist parties obtained seats in the European Parliament. The role of party discourse is equally important in shaping the voters' opinions on the integration of asylum seekers. The anti-immigration position, resulting from ethnocentrism, the rejection of

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[71] Politico, "In graphics: How Europe voted," last modified 27 May 2019, https://www.politico.eu/article/how-europe-voted-election-2019-parliament-results/

multiculturalism and the promotion of cultural assimilation, is a doctrinal element that continues to bring supporters and votes for far-right populist parties.

The refugee crisis was the factor that triggered and maintained ethnocentrism. Position towards immigrants' cultural baggage, reflected in political discourse on all media, and opposition to multiculturalism are two factors which do not fall under the incidence of the context. The cause resides in the electoral strategies of populists: they don't want to abandon this line because they can lose an important sector of their supporters – people attached to regionalism and nationalism who want European integration only with indigenous cultures.

We also demonstrated the second hypothesis, which claims that the connection between the immigration issue and European integration can incline the balance in favour of PRRPs in the future European electoral competition. According to the voter's and parties' positions on the immigration and EU issues at the 2019 EP elections, we concluded that far-right parties could gain more votes through changes in the salience of policy issues rather than by changes in their policy positions, especially related to the EU issue. Society's perception and importance given to the public agenda issues are more important than the parties' position on EU integration. Knowing that far-right parties tend to hold distinctive positions on the EU issue, they are expected to gain votes when this issue's salience is higher. Additionally, when an issue is salient, parties have a greater incentive to change their policy position and avoid the large punishment associated with incongruence.[72]

The results confirm our knowledge about the importance of EU integration and immigration issues in EP elections. Voters, as expected, reward parties for taking policy positions that converge with their preferred positions, and conversely. The policies on the issue of immigration are more impacting at the regional level. The voters' experience and contacts with immigrants and refugees lead to a specific perception of them. Far-right voters tend to have a negative attitude toward these social and ethnic categories, and consequently, this reflects their electoral preferences.

The relative salience of European integration in the party discourse can leverage voting preferences in 2024 elections. It is a very large electoral space on this public issue, between the extreme–right and the extreme–left political movements, but our results confirm that far-right parties have more opportunities to exploit this niche in the future. Far-right parties' extreme positions, especially on immigration, limit their positional strategies. Considering that there is limited scope for becoming more extreme, moderation is their only feasible positional change. Yet, if they moderate their positions, far-right parties are not guaranteed (or even expected) to win the votes of moderate voters.[73] By comparison with this limited option, the EU integration can be considered an agenda issue with the potential to be contextually used by the populists, with more potential to provide electoral capital.

In conclusion, we affirm the need for a multilevel approach to the European Parliament elections. The political system of the European Union is designed on multiple levels. Thus, the amplitude of societal changes at the local level is as great as that reproduced at the European level. The ideological composition of the European legislature is the result of what happens at the local level, and the expansion of far-right populist parties illustrates this fact.

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[72] C. Basu, "Bridging spatial and Saliency Theory: Party size and issue selection in Campaigns," *Political Science Research and Methods* 8, no. 3 (2020): 444.

[73] Basu, "Bridging spatial and Saliency Theory," 444.

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Tables

Country /Party position	Integration of immigrants and asylum seekers	EU integration
France	10	8.63
Germany	9.95	6.71
Italy	9.82	8.37

Table 1. Parties' position on integration of immigrants and asylum seekers and EU integration. Source: Chapel Hill Expert Surveys 2019, Version 2019.1

Integration of immigrants and asylum seekers: 0 – Strongly favours multiculturalism; 10 – Strongly favours assimilation.

EU integration: 0 – European Integration is of no importance, never mentioned; 10 –European Integration is the most important issue.

Country /Medium voter position	Integration of immigrants and asylum seekers	EU integration
France	6.0	5.0
Germany	4.9	3.9
Italy	5.8	4.0

Table 2. Medium voter's position on integration of immigrants and asylum seekers and EU integration. Source: European Parliament Election Study 2019, GESIS, Cologne, 2019. ZA7581 Data file Version 2.0.1

Integration of immigrants and asylum seekers: 0 – Strongly favours multiculturalism; 10 – Strongly favours assimilation.

EU integration: 0 – European Integration is of no importance, never mentioned; 10 –European Integration is the most important issue.

INTERROGATING THE ECONOMICS AND POLITICS OF COVID-19 IN NIGERIA: NOTES AND REFLECTIONS OF AN ECONOMIC HISTORIAN

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Rezumat: Studiile existente au arătat că, de-a lungul istoriei, societatea umană s-a confruntat, la un moment dat sau altul, cu boli şi epidemii. De asemenea, cercetătorii au stabilit că bolile infecţioase şi transmisibile existau şi în perioada în care omenirea era faza de vânători-culegători, însă trecerea la viaţa agrară acum 10 000 de ani a creat comunităţi care au făcut mai posibile epidemiile. Căutarea de către om a vieţii în comunitate şi expansiunea asociată cu viaţa civilizată, extinderea aşezărilor, construirea de oraşe şi formarea de rute comerciale pentru a conecta aşezările şi pentru a purta războaie au condus la situaţii în care epidemiile au trecut de stadiul local pentru a deveni pandemii. *Când*, *cum* şi *de ce* s-a desfăşurat episodul COVID-19 în Nigeria sunt punctele de plecare ale studiului de faţă, mai ales din punctul de vedere al istoriei economice. Articolul include abordări istorice, descriptive şi analitice. Sursa primară pentru această cercetare se bazează pe investigaţiile de teren efectuate în Nigeria şi în teritoriile înconjurătoare. Printre altele, procesul de colectare a datelor include interviuri semi-structurate cu persoane. Cercetarea utilizează de asemenea documente istorice din arhivele naţionale, bazându-se pe cercetările anterioare efectuate pe teme legate de istoria bolii COVID-19 şi răspândirea acesteia. Au fost utilizate şi relatări din presă, jurnale, scrisori şi rapoarte verbale. Constatările indică faptul că, chiar şi după mai mult de 60 de ani de independenţă, corupţia clasei politice din Nigeria, în special în ceea ce priveşte utilizarea bugetelor de stat pentru facilităţile de sănătate, a fost expusă prin apariţia COVID-19. De asemenea, s-a constatat că, deşi pandemia a provocat moartea a mii de persoane, politicienii au continuat să folosească pandemia ca instrument pentru campanii politice şi manipulare.

Abstract: Existing studies have shown that throughout history, human society has, at one time or another, faced diseases and epidemics. Researchers have also established that infectious and communicable diseases existed during the hunter-gatherer phase of humankind, but the shift to agrarian life 10 000 years ago created communities that made epidemics more possible. Man's search for community life and the expansion associated with civilized life, the development of settlements and cities, the formation of trade routes to connect them and to wage war led to situations where epidemics moved beyond the local stage to become pandemics. *When*, *how*, and *why* the COVID-19 episode unfolded in Nigeria are the starting points of the present study, focusing particularly on aspects related to economic history. The primary sources for this research are based on field investigations carried out in Nigeria and surrounding territories. Among others, the data collection process includes semi-structured interviews with individuals. The research also utilizes historical documents from national archives, building on previous research conducted on the history of COVID-19 and its spread. Press accounts, diaries, letters and verbal reports were also used. Findings indicate that even after more than 60 years of independence, the corruption of the political class in Nigeria, particularly in the utilization of state budgets for health facilities, has been exposed through the emergence of COVID-19. It was also found that although the pandemic caused the deaths of thousands of people, politicians continued to use the pandemic as a tool for political campaigning and manipulation.

Cuvinte-cheie: Coronavirus, economie, politică, Nigeria, politicieni.

Keywords: Coronavirus, Economy, Policy, Nigeria, Politicians.

Introduction

Extant studies from the history of diseases show that man at one time or the other has been faced with one epidemic or another[1], and that when an epidemic spreads beyond a country's borders, that is when such an infectious disease is officially recognised as a pandemic. Historicizing this, scholars have opined that infectious and communicable diseases existed during humankind's hunter-gatherer days, but the shift to agrarian life 10,000 years ago created communities that made epidemics more possible. Man's quest for community life and expansion associated with civilized livings, expansions of settlements, building cities and forging trade routes to connect with other cities, and waging wars with them[2], led to situations in which epidemics left the stage of being localised to became pandemics. Over time, these have ravaged human populations, created professions and in general changed history.

Although the term COVID 19 (Corona Virus Disease 2019) is more related to the medical field, there is however, the need for the economic historian to interrogate the economics of the disease using the tools of historical analysis. This is because Economic History is the academic study of economies or economic events of the past, while looking into the future. The Research in this case is conducted using a combination of historical methods, statistical methods and the application of economic theory to historical situation and institutions. It emphasizes the economy itself, analysing it as a dynamic force and attempts to provide insight into the way it is structured and conceived[3].

In line with the above, the focus and concern of Economic History in the studies of the economics of COVID 19, is to examine the effect of the pandemic on the Nigerian economy especially as it affected the larger population of the unemployed and poverty stricken, and how it became a political tool.

Nigeria and COVID-19 Pandemic: Politics of Government and Government of Politics

Although towards the end of 2019, there were rumours of an epidemic ravaging some parts of the East Asia, with specific reference to Wuhan, China, the first reported case in China appeared in 17 November 2019, in the Hubei Province. It went unrecognized. Eight more cases appeared in December with researchers pointing to an unknown virus. This epidemic was later identified as COVID 19, an abbreviation for Corona Virus 2019. To tackle this, the government of the affected area first converted an exhibition centre into a hospital in Wuhan. The epidemic then gradually gained popularity, when ophthalmologist Dr. Li Wenliang defied government orders and released safety information to other doctors. The following day, China informed WHO and charged Li with a crime. Li died from COVID-19 just over a month later. The inability of the World Health Organisation to curtail it and the reluctance with which local and national authorities handled the case, led to a situation in which the virus escaped the Chinese border. By mid-March, it had spread globally to more than 163 countries. On 11 February 2020, the infection was officially named COVID-19. However, on 11 March 2020, the World Health Organization announced a pandemic after barrelling through 114 countries in three months and infecting over 118,000 people. And the spread wasn't anywhere near finished[4].

Nigeria was not new to epidemics before the emergence of COVID 19. Apart from stories of outbreaks recorded in local histories of the people, a notable experience was that of the 1918 epidemic, in which an estimated 500,000 died[5]. Ohadike argued that the disease was introduced into Nigeria by

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[1] Akubor Emmanuel Osewe, "The Role of Esan Traditional (herbal) Health System in Attaining the Millennium Development Goals: A neglected theme," in *A Diminishing Past-A Rescued Future: Essays on the Peoples, Traditions and Culture of the Esan of Southern Nigeria*: Ukago V and Akubor, E.O, (New Jersey:Goldline and Jacobs, 2012),112.

[2] Muhammad, Ahmedullah Ibn Khaldun and Karl Marx: *Five Centuries of History and Two Civilisations Apart, Yet Remarkably Similar*; https://alochonaa.com/2014/10/21/ibn-khaldun-and-karl-marx-five-centuries-of-history-and-two-civilisations-apart-yet-remarkably-similar/ (2014)

[3] E. Aert and Wee Vander, "Economic History", in *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioural Science*, eds. Neil Smelser and Baltes Paul. ScienceDirect; https//www.sciencedirect.com. 4104=410 (2002), 2.

[4] Aert and Vander, "Economic History".

[5] A. Abankula, "How Spanish Flu Killed 500,000 Nigerians 102 Years Ago," *PM Newspaper.* https://www.pmnewsnigeria.com/2020/04/01/flashback-how-another-pandemic-virus-killed-50000 0-nigerians-102-years-ago/; Don Ohadike, "Diffusion and physiological responses to the Influenza Pandemic of 1918–19 in Nigeria," *Social Science and Medicine Journal Sm. Sci. Med*. Vol. 32, No. 12 (1991): 1-8

passengers and crews who arrived via ship from overseas[6]. Thus, coastal ports were the primary focus of the diffusion of the disease. Its spread to the hinterland was facilitated by improvements in transportation technology. Neither maritime quarantine, nor the isolation of patients withheld the spread of the disease. Emphasizing this, Ohadike wrote: "About 500,000 Nigerians, out of a population of 18 million, died in less than 6 months, and between 50% and 80% of the population was stricken; (…) The over-crowded urban centres were the hardest hit and, even though the pandemic declined almost as suddenly as it began, morbidity, mortality, and panic adversely affected the productive capacity of the country."[7]

Available evidence shows that the pandemic which is traced to Spain found its entry into the Nigerian border through Sierra Leone: "Following telegraphic communication from Sierra Leone stating that there was a serious epidemic of influenza at Freetown, (…) and advising that all ships from the United Kingdom and Sierra Leone should be considered infected."[8] Influenza was declared a notifiable infectious disease on 3 September 1918. Shortly after, on 14 September the S.S. Ashanti arrived from Sierra Leone and the Gold Coast with a history of more sickness on board. The body of a man who had died on board before arrival was taken ashore; a post-mortem examination showed that he died from influenza[9].

Other accounts tell us that: "On the same day S.S. Bida put in from the Gold Coast with no less than 239 people on board. It was later reported that: These passengers landed at Lagos and dispersed in all directions before the sanitary authorities were aware of the fact. These passengers were undoubtedly the primary cause of spreading influenza so rapidly and so intensely throughout Nigeria, and of the many thousands of deaths which followed. It was quite impossible to trace these passengers. In the days following, those who had been in contact with the passengers of the Bida, be they customs clerks or medical officers, spread the disease ever further, and on 25 September Lagos was declared infected under the Public Health Ordinance. Throughout the month of October, the disease raged through Lagos."[10] At the end of the ravage, an estimated 1,200 people died from the influenza out of the Lagos population of 80,000 plus. Even much more deaths were recorded in the hinterland that led Ohadike to give an estimate of 500,000 dying in Nigeria of the pandemic disease.[11]

Nigeria is one of the 210 countries affected globally by Covid, with its first official case confirmed on 27 February 2020 in Lagos state. This index case was a 44-year old man, an Italian citizen who returned from Milan, Italy, on 24 February and presented himself at a health facility on 26 February 2020. Following the confirmation of the index case, 216 people were identified as contacts to be followed up. Of these, 45 travelled out of Nigeria and one of the remaining 176 contacts was confirmed to be positive for COVID-19 on 9 March 2020.[12] Since the first recorded case, Nigeria has continued to experience an increase in the number of cases, which has spread across several states. While the majority of initial cases were imported, most of the new ones have no travel history or contact with such people. This is highly suggestive of ongoing community transmission and non-compliance with WHO regulations.[13]

When it became clear that COVID 19 was taking over the world, various governments began to take measures to ensure the safety of their people. This led to the close down of institutions and business offices. In the case of Nigeria, as of 25 May, in 2020, a total of 8,068 cases of COVID-19 were recorded in 34 of Nigeria's 36 states, as well as in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), with Lagos state recording the highest figure. Coincidentally, only two states at this time had no officially recorded cases: Kogi State in the country's middle belt region and Cross River State in the south.[14]

As a way of assisting Lagos state to fight the pandemic, the federal government released the sum of 10 billion naira, an issue which was to later turn the COVID 19 issue to politics. It was at this

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[6] Ohadike, "Diffusion and physiological responses".
[7] Ohadike, "Diffusion and physiological responses".
[8] Ohadike, "Diffusion and physiological responses".
[9] Ohadike, "Diffusion and physiological responses".
[10] Ohadike, "Diffusion and physiological responses".
[11] Ohadike, "Diffusion and physiological responses".
[12] W.S. Ajisegiri, O.O. Odusanya and R. Joshi, "COVID-19 Outbreak Situation in Nigeria and the Need for Effective Engagement of Community Health Workers for Epidemic Response." *Global Biosecurity*, 1(4), 2020: 123.
[13] Ajisegiri, "COVID-19 Outbreak Situation in Nigeria", 123.
[14] Adie O. Offiong, "COVID 19: When a Governor believes it's a hoax and ordinary flu", *Good Governance Africa*; Leadership Style, Abuja, 3 June 2020, 3-4.

point that the government of Kano state requested 15 billion naira on the ground that is far larger in space and figure compared to Lagos state. On the other hand, the governor of Rivers state (Nigeria's rich oil state), Governor Nyemson Wike, argued that Rivers state was being denied fund to fight COVID 19 because of his critical stance against the APC government. He also argued that the state should be given more, being part of the Niger Delta states that produce oil on which the country largely depends. This was to later lead to open aggression between the Federal governor and the governor of Rivers state. As a way of showing his grievance against the federal government, Governor Wike decided to stop movement of federal government owned aircraft in and around Rivers state airspace (he claimed that he had absolute right over the airspace). In a show of power, Governor Wike seized helicopter belonging to the Federal government, with the crew on federal (national) assignment, during which the crew were summarily taken to a court in Rivers State, charged and detained despite intervention from various quarters, including the Federal Government.[15]

On the other hand, both Kogi and Cross Rivers states governors declared that the COVID-19 issue was a hoax, while at the same time the governors of both states refused to allow testing for the virus.[16] In the case of Governor Yahaya Bello of Kogi State, he openly declared that the whole issue was a complete hoax and an attempt of the government and other political figures to steal public funds, while at the same time accusing the National Center for Disease Control (NCDC) of dubiously allocated index cases to Kogi state. In a video posted on his Facebook page on March 25 which went viral, the governor made the claim that: "Ninety per cent of the noise about COVID-19 is for political, economic, financial [or] material gain. The other 10% [relates to] ordinary flu, like the common colds Nigerians generally suffer."[17]

Similarly, the state government used all machineries and apparatus within its power to discredit the existence of the pandemic, even when it was obvious that it was already ravaging neighbouring states. For instance, on 7 May 2020, while the health commissioner of Kogi State, Dr. Saka Haruna, was claiming that false information was being circulated, that the state already had COVID-19 cases, Benue State on its eastern border was recording its first cases. Tens and then hundreds of new infections were reported in the FCT. Instead of making available medical facilities in the state, governor Yahaya Bello claimed the state had put in place a web and mobile app, which aims to track possible cases in the state, which was controversial. Commenting on the non-functionality of the Kogi State web and mobile app, Offiong, wrote: "An online test carried out via questionnaire filled out on the app, certifies a user to 'either be at high risk, medium risk or low risk of having Covid-19. High risk individuals will get immediate medical attention from the Kogi State Ministry of Health', according to information on the website. However, when I tried to download the app for the Android platform, a pop-up warning appeared with the message: 'This type of file can harm your device. Do you want to keep Kogi Covid 19App.apk anyway?'. Naturally, this left me unwilling to install the app on my phone."[18]

Adding to the confusion, governor Bello initially refused to allow National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) teams to carry out tests in the state and also insisted that any staff sent to the state (from NCDC) should be placed under 14-day quarantine. After much pressure, criticism and reports from the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) and other Medical bodies especially from within Kogi state, governor Bello eventually allowed the NCDC carry out tests. Two of those cases came back positive on 27 May 2020, but the governor rejected the results, insisting that the state was COVID-19 free.[19] Till date, the governor claims that his state never experienced COVID-19, while there are evidences of deaths due to the pandemic.[20]

While other states were putting up structures to serve as isolation or treatment centres, Kogi state government told the public that the Isolation centre built by the state in preparation for possible out-break of COVID-19 had been destroyed by pre-rainy season wind on 28 April 2020.[21] While

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[15] Clement Ukpong, "Wike to Federal Government: Why give Lagos N10 billion for COVID-19 and nothing to Rivers?" – *Premium Times*, Abuja, 16 April 2020, 4.

[16] Adewale Kupoluyi, "Nigeria: Is Kogi and Cross River Truly COVID-19 Free?", *This Day* (Lagos), 18 May 2020, 33

[17] Offiong, "COVID 19: When a Governor believes it's a hoax and ordinary flu", 3-4.

[18] Offiong, "COVID 19: When a Governor believes it's a hoax and ordinary flu", 3-4.

[19] Offiong, "COVID 19: When a Governor believes it's a hoax and ordinary flu", 3-4.

[20] Babajide Otitoju, Journalists Hangout, Television Commercial (TVC) Nigeria, 8 September, 2020

[21] Offiong, "COVID 19: When a Governor believes it's a hoax and ordinary flu", 3-4.

people did not doubt this, they however question the billions of tax payers' money that the government allegedly spent on the construction of such a structure that could not stand the test of time. Although independent source claimed that it cost the state 7 billion naira (18 million USD) to build and equip the Kogi Isolation Centre[22], the government was quick to deny such information, claiming it as rumour spread by detractors.[23]

While the governor of Kogi state was making reckless statements about the Covid-19 Pandemic situation, and travelling across the country without protective measures (especially the use of mask or shield), his Cross River State counterpart, Ben Ayade, a trained environmental microbiologist and professor, questioned the need for social distancing as prescribed by the World Health Organisation (WHO), arguing that the use of mask is sufficient protection. In a video that went viral on social media on 9 April 2020, Ben Ayade, publicly boasted thus: "You don't need social distancing when you are properly protected because for your mucal glands that secretes the mucus and the mucins already form a network of coats to attack the virus (…). This might be true of normal health conditions; mucins, a major component of mucus, can act 'as a selective barrier'. But 'disease can ensue when mucin structure and production are abnormal', according to an article in Harvard University's SITN blog series."[24] Governor Ben Ayade also went on to claim that the serum of those who had recovered from COVID-19 could be used to produce a vaccine, for which he was bashed on social media and condemned. This was because many saw the statement as reckless and capable of leading to the spread of the disease.[25]

In the south-western part of the country, the formal capital city of the country, Lagos, was not spared of the politics of Covid 19. Although initially the Lagos state was noted and commended for tackling the issued adequately, government daily spending on each patient led to suspicion among the Nigerian people that the government was detracting state resources through the COVID 19 scheme. This was the case when the Lagos Commissioner for Health, Akin Abayomi, argued that Lagos state government spent about N100,000 (an estimated 70 million dollars) daily on each COVID-19 patients whose case is mild-to moderate. He added that a severe case could gulp up to one million naira to maintain on a daily basis.[26] The people were alarmed when he noted that for high care or intensive care, that amount can go up to anything from N500,000 (an estimated 350 million dollars) to even a million naira (an estimated 700 million dollars) per day. This statement was made while the Commissioner for Health, Akin Abayomi, was speaking on the financial cost of managing COVID-19 patients in the state's isolation centres. He also used the occasion to announce that as at the period (July, 2020), Lagos state had 13,543 confirmed COVID-19 cases, 2,075 of the cases discharged from isolation centres, while 192 deaths were recorded.[27] Nigerians (especially people of Lagos state), became suspicious of the government considering the fact that, the government of the neighbouring Oyo state had debunked the use of state fund in fighting COVID 19.

The revelation and position of the governor of Oyo state, Seyi Makinde, alarmed Nigerians and the general populace of the way the governor recovered from COVID 19, without spending state resources. It was later revealed by the Office of Oyo State Government that days back, the governor of Oyo state had contracted the Coronavirus disease, which was successfully managed using a mixture of honey, Vitamin C and Black seed oil under a period less than seven days[28]. In this case the governor specifically argued that he boosts his immunity with local solutions, referring to leaves and herbs.[29] This also coincided with the period when Maurice Iwu, Nigerian virologist and professor, Ooni of Ife and Oba Ogunwusi II, ruler of Ile-Ife kingdom, claimed openly that Coronavirus could be

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[22] Saint Mienpamo, "It cost us N7Billion naira to build and equip the Kogi Isolation Centre for COVID 19 which rain destroyed- Yahaya Bello", Ninja Live TV, https//www.naijalivetv.com; 2 May 2020

[23] Akinsuyi Temidayo, "COVID 19: Kogi Denies Spending N7bn on Isolation Centre", *Independence Newspaper Nigeria*, 2 May 2020. https//:www.independent.ng.

[24] Offiong, "COVID 19: When a Governor believes it's a hoax and ordinary flu", 3-4.

[25] Offiong, "COVID 19: When a Governor believes it's a hoax and ordinary flu", 3-4.

[26] Lara Adejoro, "Lagos spends N.1m daily on each mild-to-moderate COVID-19 Patient –Commissioner", *Punch Newspaper* (Lagos) 23 July 2020, 10.

[27] Adejoro, "Lagos spends N.1m daily", 10

[28] Ruth Okwumbu, "COVID 19: Seyi Makinde recovers, resumes work", *Nairametrics on line*, 2020, 12. https://nairametrics.com.

[29] Violet Johnson, "Coronavirus: Seyi Makinde says he boosts immunity with 'Local Solution,"; *Guardian Newspaper*, Nigeria, 8 April, 2020, 22.

cured with local herbs.[30] People became even more sceptical of the expenditure of the government on the management of people who contracted Coronavirus disease, when they discovered that there were instances when the state government figures contradicted that of the Nigerian Centre for Disease Control, a body set up by the Federal Government to oversee the control/management of the Coronavirus disease. In response to this disparity, opposition party in Lagos state immediately called for a probe of the governor, alleging mismanagement, misappropriation and embezzlement.[31]

Another noteworthy event in Nigeria´s fight against the coronavirus outbreak was when the country declined Chinese medical experts to assist the country in managing the situation.[32] At the announcement of the proposed invitation of an 18-member Chinese medical team to support the country's fight against coronavirus, The Nigerian Medical Association (NMA) rejected it, describing the issue as "a thing of embarrassment to the membership of the Association and other health workers who are giving their best in the fight against Covid-19 pandemic under deplorable working conditions."[33] On the other hand, the Trade Union Congress of Nigeria (TUC) had advised the federal government against the plan, saying it was unnecessary to invite Chinese doctors as Nigeria was already handling the crisis effectively[34]. All of these fell on deaf ears, as the government argued that the Chinese medical team were only coming to share experiences with the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) and not to directly take charge of the fight against COVID-19 pandemic in the country.[35] At the end of the day, even at the risk of importing the virus, the Chinese team was airlifted to Nigeria, welcomed on arrival by the Nigerian government represented by the Health Minister, Osagie Ehinare. Soon after, rumour began circulating that the supposed experts were actually a group of business men who came into the country to conduct their businesses. This was to be later confirmed by the Health Minister. When asked by a reporter about the whereabouts of the invited Chinese medical specialists, Mr Ehanire said he would be glad not to be asked about the whereabouts of the medical team. According to the minister: "I want to explain that first of all, I think not all of them are doctors and I heard that some of them are technicians but they are staff of CCECC (…); The ministry of health is not their host, so we cannot always explain what happened to them or where they are (…) There seems to be a lot of interest in these doctors but they are staff of a company. I would be very happy if you do not ask me where they are. (…) They are not really our guests in that sense but we have been able to learn some things from them. We shared ideas of what they did in their country in managing COVID-19."[36]

In the south of the country, Cairo Ojougboh, Director of Projects within the Niger Delta Development Commission, claimed that the named agency gave N20 million to each senator and N15 million to each member of the House of Representatives as palliatives for COVID-19.[37] Ojougboh made this claim in an interview, in which he declared that: "the country will break up if the NDDC releases a list of those involved in looting the commission; In the National Assembly, each of the senators got N20 million, while the House of Representatives members got N15 million for COVID-19 from the National Assembly. They all received COVID-19 allowances.[38] There have also been allegations of reckless spending by the Niger Delta Development Commission agency, ranging from spending N1.5 billion as COVID-19 palliatives for its staff, to spending N85.6 million for top officials to attend a graduation ceremony in the United Kingdom during the lockdown in Nigeria.[39] It is important to note that as of 2023, this allegation has neither been denied nor refuted by the Commission.

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[30] Johnson, "Coronavirus: Seyi Makinde says", 2020
[31] Olumide Seye and Salau Gbenga, "Lagos PDP seeks probe of state's daily spending on COVID 19 patients", *The Guardian Nigeria*, 27 July 2020, 13. https://t.guardian.ng.
[32] Onyeji Ebuka, "Coronavirus: Nigerian Doctors Reject Country's Plan To Invite Chinese Medical Team", *Premium Times*, Abuja, Saturday, 5 September 2020.
[33] Ebuka, "Coronavirus: Nigerian Doctors Reject", 22.
[34] Ebuka, "Coronavirus: Nigerian Doctors Reject", 22.
[35] Ebuka, "Coronavirus: Nigerian Doctors Reject", 22.
[36] Nike Adebowale, "Nigeria: Chinese 'Doctors' Not Really Our Guests - Health Minister," *Premium Times* (Abuja), 14 May 2020
[37] Queen Esther Iroanusi, "NDDC: No senator received N20m as COVID-19 Palliative – Senate", *Premium Times*, 1 September 2020.
[38] Iroanusi, "NDDC: No senator received N20m".
[39] Iroanusi, "NDDC: No senator received N20m".

The Economics of the Nigerian Economy during the heat of COVID 19

While the majority of the population was grappling with hardship, with scandals and distrust around the management of public funds in the period of COVID 19, and the lockdown associated with it, the Nigerian economy, which was already fragile before the coronavirus outbreak in late 2019, was among the sectors worst hit by the pandemic. The global economic crises due to the coronavirus pandemic resulted in unprecedented disruptions to global supply chains, a sharp drop in global crude oil prices, turmoil in global stock and financial markets, the lockdown of large swath movements of people in many countries, among others. Experts opined that these outcomes have had severe consequences on households' livelihoods and business activities, resulting in a drop in global demand, consumer confidence in decline and a slowdown in production.[40]

For instance, in the oil and gas sector, there was a decline in crude oil prices due to weakening global demand for Brent crude. Nigeria's benchmark grade dropped by over 60% from the beginning of the year 2020. The effect of the crash in global oil prices in turn necessitated the downward adjustment of the reference price of crude oil from $57 per barrel to $30 and further down to $25 per barrel for the implementation of the 2020 budget.[41] As a consequence, the general welfare of the people declined substantially.

In the case of the aviation industry, the closedown of both the local and international space brought serious damage to the daily income of airline operators and their dependants. This was due to the fact that there were cases of job loss, especially during the period of the lockdown. Available statistics showed that the aviation sector alone witnessed over 100,000 workers (directly and indirectly related to the sector) losing their jobs. In monetary terms, it is estimated that the Nigerian aviation sector lost nearly N17 billion monthly due to the grounding of flights.

Similarly, the banking sector experienced limited operations during the lockdown and the plan by some of the banks to lay off staff due to difficult operating environment was halted by the Central Bank of Nigeria[42].

As far as the hospitality and entertainment industries were concerned, the cancellation of many bookings saw the closure of many hotels. Film and entertainment companies had to terminate operations for the period of the lockdown. For the health sector, the pandemic exposed the many deficiencies of the national system, particularly in infrastructure.[43] The hospitals that for years have been ill equipped, could not stand the pressure of the moment. In fact, despite promises of adequate care, Nigerians many times avoided public hospitals taking refuge in private ones.

As previously mentioned, the situation in Nigeria was precarious even before the pandemic. A large part of the Nigerian people was living in what has been described as absolute poverty,[44] official statistics showing that less than 20 million people (or estimated 27 per cent of the population) were living in poverty in 1980[45]. However, findings released by the World Data Lab's Poverty Clock shows that over 95 million Nigerians (or 48 per cent of the population) are living in extreme poverty, defined as those who live on less than $1.90 per day.[46] Poverty levels vary across the country; the north-western part of the country has the highest incidence of poverty, whilst the southeast has the lowest. The majority (63 per cent) of the poor live in rural areas. Yet during the lockdown, the Federal Government revealed that it spent about N523.3 million on school feeding programs, as against the

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[40] "Nigerian economy and traumatic impact of Covid-19 pandemic", *African Press Agency* – Lagos (Nigeria), 13 June 2020, 1.

[41] African Press Agency, Nigerian economy and traumatic impact of Covid-19 pandemic, 13.

[42] Efem Nkam Ubi, "Nigeria needs a Post-Covid-19 Poverty Alleviation Strategy", *Financial Nigeria*, 15 May 2020, 10.

[43] Emmanuel Osewe Akubor, "Attaining Millennium Development Goals in the Midst of Corruption in Nigeria: Reality or Fiction?", *Ibadan Dominican Studies, Vol. 3* (2017), 121.

[44] Akubor Emmanuel Osewe, "Poverty and Unemployment and the Rise of Violent Crime in Nigeria between 1999 and 2008". *Mambayya House Journal of Democratic Studies (MHJSD), Aminu Kano Centre for Democratic Research and Training, Mambayya House Bayero University, Kano, Vol I, no I*, (2011): 40.

[45] Akubor, "Poverty and Youth Restiveness in the Niger Delta: Threat to National Security", 32.

[46] Efem Nkem Ubi, "Nigeria needs a post-Covid-19 poverty alleviation strategy", *Financial Nigeria*. https://www.financialnigeria.com/nigeria-needs-a-post-covid-19-poverty-alleviation-strategy-blog-543.htm. Accessed May 15, 2020.

initial N13.5bn earlier declared as monthly expenditure for the period.[47] This was a program the government was advised against as the pupils were all at home during the lockdown. Yet, it went on with the program claiming that it spent the said amount on children in only two states and the Federal Capital Territory, as follows: in the FCT, 29,609 households were impacted, 37,589 households in Lagos and 60,391 in Ogun, giving a total of 124,589 households that benefited from the programme between 14 May and 6 July. This act has been described as a charade as these are not the only states that constitute the Federal Republic of Nigeria with children. Specifically, the Nigerian Union of Teachers described the act as fraudulent, while others saw a serious call for concern and attention regarding this issue.[48]

In the midst of the avalanche of scandals and collective distrust in Nigerian society, the United Nations raised the alarm of a possible famine in the area, which has yet to be overcome [49]. This also was attributed to the effect of COVID 19, to the killing people in some parts of the country, the displacement which followed, especially in the Middle Belt region and northern part of the country, which is the food base of the nation.[50] Specifically, the Report emphasized that: "Alarming level of food security and hunger have arisen largely as a result of the actions of extremists affiliated with armed groups in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states in Nigeria; more than 10 million people in the three states –about 80% of the population – need humanitarian assistance and protection, an almost 50% increase since 2019 and the highest recorded since humanitarian operations began, Yet the UN appeal is only 33% funded, its lowest."[51]

On the Famine situation, the United Nations Secretary General Anthonio Guterres opined that during the said period, Nigeria lost 25% of the rice harvest to flood. It is also estimated that during that time, about 2 million tons of rice were washed away by floods in the country, more than 25% mentioned by the UN.[52] Corroborating the position of Antonio Guterres, Mohammed Sahabi, Chairman of Rice Farmers Association of Nigeria, revealed that at least 450,000 hectares (1.2 million acres) were destroyed in the main rice growing Kebbi state. Nlebem argued that farmers had aimed at targeting a 2.5 million-ton contribution to the national basket, but will now meet less than 20% of that. This is because similar losses were reported in Kano, Niger, Enugu, Jigawa and Nasarawa.[53]

Reacting to this trend, Ogunyemi Adetunji said that: "The country is acting as an auto-pilot, as if somebody is absent in government. There is a complete and total disequilibrium and disarticulation between political economy and the economy of welfare which is the responsibility of the Nigerian state. This is indeed a sign of insensitivity in governance. At a time when most governments of the world are stepping up to provide palliative to give their people the best of governance, the Nigerian government is facing the opposite direction, taking unpopular and mass unfriendly decisions at the time in world history."[54]

Generally, the way and manner in which the government at both the state and federal levels handled the issue of the COVID 19 pandemic, especially in the areas of health, humanitarian gestures,

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[47] Chike Olisah, "FG reveals amount spent on school feeding program during lockdown, denies spending N13.5bn monthly, Over 20% of N-Power beneficiaries are now business owners" – FG; https://nairametrics.com/2020/08/04/fg-reveals-amount-spent-on-school-feeding-program-during-lockdown-denies-spending-n13-5bn-monthly/. *NairaMetrics*, (Lagos), 4 August 2020; Sanni Kunle, "COVID 19: We Spent over N500 million feeding pupils during lockdown-Minister", *Premium Time*, Nigeria, 4 August 2020; https://www.premiumtimesng.com; Uroko Chuka, "Nigeria's School feeding programme in lockdown," *Business Day*, Nigeria, 24 May 2020; https://businessday.ng

[48] Olisah, "FG reveals amount spent on school"; Emmanuel Osewe Akubor and Gerald Musa, "The Maguzawa and Nigerian Citizenship: Reflecting on Identity Politics and National Question in Africa," *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies Vol. 41:I,* U.S.A (2018): 22-33.

[49] Emmanuel Osewe Akubor, "Corruption and Embezzlement in Government in Africa: Reflections on the Nigeria Situation". *Proceeding of 55th congress of the Historical Society of Nigeria Conference Nigeria @ 50: Grappling with Governance, 1960 – 2010.* (2012).

[50] Chioma Unini, "UN Warns of Famine Risk in Nigeria, 3 other Countries," *The Nigeria Lawyer –International News*, 6 September 2020. https://thenigerlawyer.com/un-warns-of-famine-risk-in-nigeria-3-other-countries/ ; Akubor, Emmanuel Osewe, "Climate Change, Leadership Challenges and Food Security in Nigeria: A Historical Reflection,". *Historical Research Letter, Vol.14, United States of America* (2014)

[51] Unini, "UN Warns of Famine Risk in Nigeria".

[53] Anthony Nlebem, Floods wash away 2million tonnes of Nigeria's rice harvest. https://businessday.ng/lead-story/article/floods-wash-away-2m-tonnes-of-nigerias-rice-harvest/. September 5, 2020

[54] Ogunyemi Adetunji "Frank Talk" Rave FM Osogbo Political Analysis Program, September 7th 2020

finances and expenditure, has made the population to pass a vote of no confidence on the authorities. The enthusiasm showed by the people at the beginning of the pandemic could be seen in the areas of individuals as well as corporate organisations (especially banks) donating to support the government in the fight against the virus. Of the N36.3bn public funds and donations paid into the COVID-19 Eradication Support Accounts, N1.4bn came from Nigerians and companies through accounts at the First Bank, Access Bank, Guaranteed Trust Bank, Zenith, and UBA, while N536m were donated through the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN). The N536 donations comprise of N89m and N279m from the Senate and House of Representatives, respectively. In addition, China General Chamber of Commerce in Nigeria donated N48m; the Petroleum Equalization Management Board gave N50m while the Nigerian Content Development and Monitoring Board donated N70m.[55]

The level of mistrust in state authorities, especially in their inability to support the poorest of the Nigerian people during the period has led to vehement requests for accountability and change of the government. Even when this has been done, the Nigerian public further asked for summaries of expenditures. This has been the case since the Federal Government of Nigeria has disclosed that it spent N30,540,563,571.09, representing 84% of the N36.3 billon public funds and donations received to respond to COVID-19 between 1 April 2020 and 31 July 2020, leaving unaccounted for N5.9 billion. For instance, the Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP) and Connected Development (CODE) have specifically noted that: "It is refreshing to note that 115 ordinary Nigerians donated between N1 and N100 to support the authorities' efforts to fight COVID-19, despite the fact that it is the country's poorest and most disadvantaged sectors of the population that continue to bear the brunt of the COVID-19 pandemic. We would therefore be grateful to receive more specific details and additional information on the spending of N34.4bn between April and July, and details on plans to spend the balance of the balance of N5.9 billion in the COVID-19 Eradication Support Accounts. We would be grateful if the requested details and additional information are provided to us within 7 days of the receipt and/or publication of this letter. If we have not heard from you by then, SERAP and CODE shall take all appropriate legal actions under the Freedom of Information Act and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights to compel you to comply with our request."[56]

In a more detailed account, among the requests were the following: "Details and breakdown of where the N34.4bn public funds from the Federal Government came from, and whether or not the money was duly appropriated by the National Assembly; (…) Details of specific projects and activities on which the Presidential Task Force on COVID-19 has spent the N22.16bn, which represents 72% of the money spent, including how the spending has directly or indirectly benefited Nigerians, as well as details of names of any such beneficiaries; (…) Details and breakdown of money, if any, spent to provide personal protective equipment to Nigerian doctors and medical workers who are at the forefront in the fight against COVID-19; (…) Details and breakdown of the N7bn given to 36 states, and the specific amount of money collected by each state. This money represents 23% of the total amount spent within 4 months; (…) Details and breakdown of the N877m (2.9% of the money) spent by the Nigerian Air Force for deployment of assets in support of COVID-19 operations, as well as the nature of any such operations; (…) Details and breakdown of the N500m (1.6% of the money) spent by the Nigerian Police on personal protective equipment; (…) The Office of the Accountant General of the Federation should also take steps to approach and request from the Presidential Task Force on COVID-19, the Nigerian Air Force, Nigeria Police Force, and the 36 states any of the details highlighted above, if the information is not held by your Office, in line with the provisions of the Freedom of Information (FoI) Act (…). Under the FoI Act, other public institution or institutions that may be holding the requested information are obligated to provide the information."[57]

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[55]   https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/more-news/412708-we-spent-n31-billion-in-four-months-to-fight-covid-19-fg.html.

[56] SERAP, CODE demand FG's 'details and breakdown' of N34.4 billion April-July COVID-19 spending
Openlife Reporter, 6 September 2020. https://openlife.ng/serap-code-demand-fgs-details-and-breakdown-of-n34-4-billion-april-july-covid-19-spending/.

[57] SERAP, CODE demand FG's 'details and breakdown' of N34.4 billion April-July COVID-19 spending;1-20

COVID 19 and its implications for the Nigerian Economy: Today and the Future

Although the world in general and Nigeria in particular is yet to completely witness the end of the COVID 19 disease (what has been referred to as the Post COVID Era), some experts and analysts are of the view that the impacts will be felt not only presently but also in the future. In the case of Nigeria, which has largely been a mono-economy, scholars have argued that, apart from the loss of jobs, the country will experience worst economic problems and starvation. This has been clearly stated by the Nigeria Bureau of Statistics and the World Bank Poverty Survey in August 2020.[58] For instance, the second quarter (Q2) of 2020, the Labour Force Survey (LFS) – collected by the Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) between the 17 June and 8 July 2020 – provides crucial information on households' response to COVID-19 in the key states of Kano, Lagos, Rivers, and FCT Abuja, which can be bench-marked against pre-crisis data from the 2018/19 Nigerian Living Standards Survey (NLSS). Several key insights emerge from this analysis:

- The share of people engaged in economic activities in the four states was lower in June/July 2020 than before the COVID-19 crisis, especially in FCT Abuja where the share of people working was down by around 14%.
- Even if some people have resumed work, incomes may still be precarious, with larger shares of workers in Kano and Rivers engaged in agriculture and a smaller share of workers in Lagos engaged in industry than before the COVID-19 crisis.
- Food insecurity appears to be prevalent across all four states, but especially in Rivers and FCT Abuja where 79% and 72% of households reported having to skip meals since the start of the pandemic.
- Households in all four states are drawing down their savings and borrowing money to cover their living expenses, which may leave them more economically vulnerable and reduce their investments in human capital in the future.
- More than 1 in 5 households in Kano and FCT Abuja and more than 1 in 10 households in Lagos and Rivers reported violating containment measures in order to maintain a living, emphasizing the trade-offs households face between earning incomes and protecting their health.
- The coverage of social assistance, in the form of free food, varied dramatically between the four states with 43% of households in Rivers having received food assistance since the start of the pandemic compared with just 5% of households in Kano (the state with the highest poverty headcount rate of the four); social assistance in cash or in kind was far rarer.
- Despite some variation between the four states, the majority of households knew about the importance of washing hands with soap and water (at least three-quarters of households in each state) and using face masks (at least 80 percent of households in each state) to protect against COVID-19. [59]

The summary of the above is that the people should expect a tougher and harder economic situation in the future, especially in the first three to five years after the pandemic. This can only be avoided if more drastic proactive measures are taken from now. There is, however, doubt in Nigerian society with regard to the present administration and its political allies. This is based on the fact that since 2021, the focus of government has been the 2023 general elections. The level of insecurity in various parts of the country is another issue that is threatening agricultural activities which is the major employment of rural dwellers. As it is presently, the majority of Nigerians who lost their job have yet to find any meaningful engagement. Also since 2019, public universities have gone on strike three times, with the 2023 situation being one of the longest since 14 February 2023. Kidnapping and banditry have become rampant in the land, affecting the youth, agriculture, businesses and communities as a whole (Tables I, II and III).

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[58] National Bureau of Statistics and World Bank Poverty Team (2020), The Impact of COVID-19 in Kano, Lagos, Rivers, and FCT Abuja: Results from the Second Quarter 2020 Labor Force Survey– August 2020. https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/nigeria/brief/monitoring-covid-19-impact-on-nigerian-households. 30 August 2020.
[59] National Bureau of Statistics and World Bank Poverty Team (2020), The Impact of COVID-19 in Kano, Lagos, Rivers, and FCT Abuja: Results from the Second Quarter 2020 Labor Force Survey– August 2020. https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/nigeria/brief/monitoring-covid-19-impact-on-nigerian-households. 30 August 2020.

Conclusion

It is safe to argue that Nigeria, a country with the distinctive paradox of being both the largest economy in Africa and the poverty capital of the world, is facing the same predicament, and that the emergence of Covid-19 has further exposed the extreme vulnerabilities of the Nigerian economy and the inefficiencies of government. During the period, the government continued to talk of palliative for the people, reeling figures in newspaper and other media, yet the people got very little and felt neglected. Unlike much of the advanced countries that promised do whatever it takes to cushion the impact of the pandemic on their economies and vulnerable people, and acted accordingly, there has been no effective response by the Nigerian government to mitigate the long suffering of the poor. One could argue that the Nigerian government needs to re-strategize and reformulate new and workable poverty alleviation policies. Poverty in Nigeria has been rising over the years, showing a climax during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. It must therefore be admitted that due to lack of effective policies by various administrations in Nigeria and corruption scandals in high places poverty incidence has risen continually to where it is today.

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Tables

Table I: 2021 REPORTED DEATHS & KIDNAPPEES (NST, 2021)

s/n	Month	Death	Total Number Kidnapped	Remark
1	January	958	405	Instilling fear in crop producing communities
2	February	879	709	Instilling fear in crop producing communities
3	March	875	605	Instilling fear in crop producing communities
4	April	1032	406	Instilling fear in crop producing communities
5	May	1042	474	Instilling fear in crop producing communities
6	June	1011	1344	Instilling fear in crop producing communities
Total	6 months	5800	2943	Destroyed Economy especially agriculture

Source: Nigeria Security Tracker (NST) / Council on Foreign Relations' Africa Program (2021), Insecurity: Total Reported Kidnappees, Jan - Jun 2021 https://www.cfr.org. 2021.

It is estimated that with total death at 5,800, it has an average of 32 cases per day. On the other hand, with an estimated total number of those kidnapped — 2,943; it is safe to opine that there was an average of 16 cases per day. This has impacted negatively on the economy, the psychology of the people as well as their hope of a better future.

Table II: TOTAL REPORTED KIDNAPPEES, JAN - JUN 2021 (NST,2021)

No	Geographical Zone	Total Number Kidnapped	Economic Impact
1	Northwest	1,405	Shortage in Agricultural supply
2	North Central	942	Shortage in Agricultural supply
3	North East	210	Shortage in Agricultural supply
4	South South	140	Shortage in Agricultural supply
5	South East	77	Shortage in Agricultural supply
6	South West	169	Shortage in Agricultural supply

Source: Nigeria Security Tracker (NST) / Council on Foreign Relations' Africa Program (2021), Insecurity: Total Reported Kidnappees, Jan - Jun 2021 https://www.cfr.org. 2021.

From the table it is clear that in the northern part of the country, the figure during the period is Northern Nigeria: 2,557, while the Southern Nigeria: 386, it is thus estimated that there were in Nigeria: 2,943 Kidnapped in 181 days; 16 per day. The Table below is a breakdown of the cases in term of states and specific locations.

Table III: TOP 12 STATES WITH MOST KIDNAPPEES IN 6 MONTHS - Jan to Jun 2021 (NST, 2021)

s/no	State	Figure	Economic Impact
1	Niger	795	Worsening Food Production
2	Zamfara	523	Worsening Food Production
3	Kaduna	479	Worsening Food Production
4	Katsina	289	Worsening Food Production
5	Borno	115	Worsening Food Production
6	Kebbi	103	Worsening Food Production
7	Oyo	63	Worsening Food Production
8	Delta	55	Worsening Food Production
9	Taraba	55	Worsening Food Production

10	FCT	52	Worsening Food Production
11	Edo	37	Worsening Food Production
12	Imo	33	Worsening Food Production

Source: Nigeria Security Tracker (NST) / Council on Foreign Relations' Africa Program (2021), Insecurity: Total Reported Kidnappees, Jan - Jun 2021 https://www.cfr.org. 2021.

SYLVIA PLATH'S DOCTORS

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Rezumat: Dimensiunea medicală a vieții Sylviei Plath este fundamentală pentru a înțelege literatura profund confesivă a autoarei. Profesioniştii medicali au investigat impactul pe care starea ei mintală l-a avut asupra operei, interacțiunilor ei cu instituția medicală, precum şi strategiile care ar fi putut schimba cursul tragic al tratamentelor sale. Odată cu deschiderea unor arhive conținând materiale până atunci inaccesibile, cercetătorii au dobândit acces la documente ce ar putea facilita o perspectivă mai clară asupra relației scriitoarei cu medicii care au încercat să-i trateze afecțiunile fizice şi psihice în ultimul an al scurtei sale existențe.

Abstract: Understanding Sylvia Plath's medical journey is crucial to grasping her confessional literature. Medical experts have consistently analysed how her mental health influenced her writing, her experiences with healthcare, and the strategies that could have altered the tragic course of her treatment. Recently opened archives offer new insights into her interactions with the doctors who tried to treat her physical and mental illnesses in the final years of her brief life.

Cuvinte-cheie: literatură confesivă, biografie, medicină, literatură, trauma, boală psihică.

Keywords: confessional literature, biography, medicine, literature, trauma, psychiatric illness.

Introduction. A larger-than-life biography

There is a dense mythology surrounding Sylvia Plath's biography, founded on her private literature and the various narrative accounts from her collaborators, friends and acquaintances. There is also, quite famously, Ted Hughes' (and the Plath Estate's) resentful mission to control and intimidate all stories competing with the carefully curated truth proposed by Plath's immediate family, a decades-long battle lasting until Hughes' death in 1998. The American writer's collapsed marriage and her difficult relationship with her mother, her relentless struggle for literary recognition undoubtedly fuelled both ends of her tragic literary destiny: on the one hand, they probably exacerbated her inner crisis, possibly releasing the massive creative energy that led to the writing of her canonically cardinal works. Paradoxically, it might have also aggravated her mental vulnerability. The medical element is fundamental to her literary myth, and the proportions and dynamics of this connection have been the subject of permanent debate, both in medical literature and in scholarly approaches to her oeuvre.

I shall explore the medical dimension in Sylvia Plath's biography in the latter months of her life, as revealed in her correspondence, while also focusing on some recently opened archives, including the already published fourteen letters she sent to her psychiatrist Ruth Tiffany Beuscher (née Barnhouse) in the 1960–1963 interval. A special emphasis will be placed on the interviews that researcher Harriet Rosenstein recorded with Dr. Beuscher and Dr. Horder in 1970. They are the two doctors with whom Plath interacted in the later period of her life, having had a strong attachment to both. Beuscher had treated her at McLean Hospital, after her August 1953 suicide attempt; they kept in touch over the years and Plath resumed their medical relationship for a few months in 1958–1959 while she lived in the US with Ted Hughes. Dr. Horder was her London GP, who often went beyond the boundaries of his medical duty to help her – he wrote the Hugheses a recommendation for the lease of their first London home and carefully monitored Plath in her final weeks. Corroborated with details emerging from other documents (including correspondence and official records), this approach aims to reveal a coherent representation of the medical element in a vaster context of Plath's biography. Since psychiatric scholars and professionals have shown a significant amount of interest in Plath's mental disorder and subsequent suicide, it is deeply relevant to investigate the medical aspects

invoked in a set of documents adjacent to the biographical dimension of Plath's works. The writer's mental condition and suicide at age thirty are inextricably linked to the state of mid-century American psychiatry and to the ways in which mental illness was approached in the early 1960s by the English medical practice. It has long been speculated that Plath was gravely affected by the ways in which she was treated by the American psychiatric system[1] and interrogations regarding Dr. Horder's prescribing Plath psychiatric drugs have been raised by Harriet Rosenstein in her interview with him.

"Call Dr. Horder"

Plath's complex mental state clearly had a root in her father's death when she was eight years old, an event that has been considered by psychiatric professionals a landmark in her adult mental itinerary, as childhood trauma is vastly recognized to have severe adverse effects in adulthood. Biographers and clinicians alike considered Otto Plath's avoidable death (he was a respected biologist who left his diabetes untreated, misdiagnosed himself, and died prematurely) a pivotal point in his daughter's biography and creative path. Following a depressive crisis, the possibly unnecessary electroshock treatment she was administered at the Valley Head clinic in July and August 1953 was also a source of massive trauma, as rightfully attested by both Ted Hughes[2] and Aurelia Plath. A decade later, adverse familial circumstances and a string of professional disappointments culminated in the winter of 1962–1963, when London plunged into a state of deep freeze, facing the coldest weather of the century. By January 1963, Plath's mental state was so deteriorated that her GP, Dr. Horder, recommended immediate psychiatric treatment. However, he couldn't find his patient a bed in what he considered a "suitable" hospital, therefore her admission was postponed by a few days. He saw her daily in the period leading up to the fateful Monday morning, 11 February 1963, when she gassed herself in the kitchen of her rented London apartment. It has become common knowledge among Plath scholars and biographers that she might have felt a tremendous amount of pressure during those final days, dreading the very idea of undergoing the same course of treatment she had to endure in 1953. There has been a significant amount of medical scholarship concerning the psychiatric dimension of Plath's biography and oeuvre, and one of its goals was to reveal the manner in which her mental condition was reflected in her art.[3] Nevertheless, Plath did not have access to psychotherapy, and she started to increasingly rely on medication and the help and advice of Dr. Horder and Dr. Ruth Tiffany Beuscher. Dr. Horder's name and address is the only information written by Plath in the note she left on her children's pram at the flat entrance before killing herself. The note (included in the archive containing the Elizabeth Hinchcliffe manuscript at Maryland University, in the United States) written in descending lines, like verses arranged as stairs or a ladder signifying a catabasis, presents some interrupted writing, as if the pen had run out of ink and had to be changed. Dr. Horder was summoned by Myra Norris, the nurse whom he had hired to take care of Plath's children while she would be in the hospital.[4] Besides his controversial decision to prescribe an antidepressant that might have been unsuitable and even dangerous in her particular case, her correspondence with Dr. Beuscher seems to have had a special relevance in the writer's final months. The fourteen letters that, along with Plath's other personal writings document her medical journey during this period, are part of a much vaster correspondence, were given, in the 1970s, by Dr Beuscher to Harriet Rosenstein, a researcher who was planning, at that moment, to write a biography of the writer. In 2017, the letters were sold by a third party to Smith College, Plath's Alma Mater, and included in the second volume of the 2017–2018 edition of Sylvia Plath's correspondence.

The impact of both Dr. Horder and Dr. Beuscher on Plath's biography has been acknowledged and analysed on numerous occasions. In what is, to this date, the most comprehensive

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[1] Heather Clark, *Red Comet: The Short Life and Blazing Art of Sylvia Plath* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2020), 1191.

[2] Ted Hughes to Rosemarie Rowley, December 4, 1997, Manuscript 88918/35/28, British Library; see also Rosemarie Rowley, "Electro-Convulsive Treatment in Sylvia Plath's Life and Work," *Thumbscrew* 10 (1998): 87-99.

[3] Laszlo Varga, "Lady Lazarus Revisited: Reflections of a Psychiatrist on the Poetry and Illness of Sylvia Plath," *McGill Journal of Medicine* 7, no. 2 (2004): 208-213; Robert Didlake, "Medical Imagery in the Poetry of Sylvia Plath," *Plath Profiles* 2 (2009): 135-144.

[4] The coroner's report, detailing the time and circumstances of Sylvia Plath's death was requested by Jillian Becker, who, along with her husband at the time, Gerry Becker, had Plath and her children, Frieda and Nicholas, as their guests, at their London home, from Thursday, Feb. 7 to Sunday, Feb. 10, 1963; Becker is also the author of a short memoir, *Giving Up: The Last Days of Sylvia Plath* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2003).

biography of the American writer, Heather Clark focuses on the roles the doctors played in Plath's life, as her marital troubles deepened and her depression worsened. Dr. Horder was among the first who arrived at her Fitzroy Road apartment on the morning of 11 February 1963. His account of that morning, given to various biographers and interviewers, remained unchanged, despite his lack of consistency regarding other details (such as the exact name of the antidepressant he prescribed Plath in early February 1963). John Horder was, at one moment in his career, the president of the Royal College of General Practitioners and, after Plath's death, his name gained a certain notoriety among the growing public interested in her life and work. Dr. Horder became acquainted with Plath's depressive state in the months leading up to her suicide and he was no stranger to the exact nature of her affliction. He had suffered depressive episodes himself, and had checked himself into mental hospitals, as he became increasingly aware of the chemical dynamic of depression. Despite his former belief in the "immorality of chemically interfering with the mind"[5] he gradually opened up to a new line of treatment that shifted the treatment paradigm in psychiatry. The 1960s were still part of the dark ages of the lobotomy, despite the resistance it was met with among American neurologists. With the advent of the first generation of antipsychotics, lobotomy slowly fell out of favour, despite still being performed on a large number of patients until the late 1960s. Although she hadn't received it as treatment during her 1953 hospitalization, lobotomy is mentioned as one of Plath's great fears in the last letter she wrote to Dr. Ruth Beuscher, on 4 February 1963 – "What appals me is the return of my madness, my paralysis, my fear & vision of the worst---cowardly withdrawal, a mental hospital, lobotomies"[6]. Recently, it has been argued in scientific interventions that another round of ECT (electroconvulsive) treatment would have benefitted Plath in 1963, significantly improving her response to depression and her overall chances to avoid a suicidal crisis.[7] Although she described the electroshock treatment she received in late July 1953 in traumatic terms throughout her oeuvre (in poetry, prose and in her letters), the rounds of treatment she received later that year, under Dr. Beuscher's supervision, greatly improved her state, to such a degree that she made a full recovery: "All the heat and fear had purged itself. I felt surprisingly at peace. The bell jar hung, suspended, a few feet above my head. I was open to the circulating air"[8].

Things were dramatically different ten years later, as Dr. Horder had not been informed by any of Plath's U.S. doctors about her previous psychiatric episode and treatment. Ted Hughes later wrote of this unfortunate gap in her medical history: "Excellent and sympathetic, he was not to know what her U.S. doctors had learned in 1953: that she must never be given the particular tranquilizing drug which he now prescribed. Her peculiarity was to react to this drug with such fits of depression that her life was endangered. She failed to identify the drug, and nobody near her in England knew about such details of her case history. He said the drug, which she was instructed never to take again, intensified feelings of suicidal depression in her".[9]

It is well-known among Plath scholars that Ted Hughes changed his position and discourse regarding the potential causes of his wife's death many times during the 35 years that he survived her. It is unlikely that Plath was indeed "allergic" to her antidepressant, while it is definitely possible that her doctor suggested she may have reacted negatively to her medication during the first weeks of treatment, as it was sometimes the case with the drug she had been prescribed, belonging to the class of monoamine oxidase inhibitors. Moreover, it has been revealed that she was prescribed more than one drug, while the interactions of these substances were poorly studied and understood at that time. Dr. Horder spoke openly about his reluctance to admit Plath to a mental hospital against her will, and he seemed to be caught between his patient's refusal to accept this solution and his awareness that Plath's mental state could deteriorate dramatically as the antidepressant effect took a few weeks to set in and the initial phase of the treatment posed the risk of heightening her energy level while also worsening her depression. Such aspects are better understood now, more than they were in the early 1960s. Dr. Horder was clearly very involved in Plath's case, as he paid her a few home visits during her final days and also seems to have visited her briefly the evening before she died. He declared to

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[5] Jane Feinmann, "Rhyme, Reason and Depression," *The Guardian*, 16 February 1993.
[6] Sylvia Plath, *The Letters of Sylvia Plath*, vol. 2 (New York: Harper Collins, 2018), 882.
[7] Per Bergsholm, "Sylvia Plath Recovered Completely by Electroconvulsive Therapy at the Age of 21 Years and Might Have Been Saved by Another Series 9 Years Later," *The Journal of ECT* 33, no. 3 (September 2017): 26.
[8] Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 215.
[9] Ted Hughes (1982) cited in Clark, *Red Comet*, 1139.

Rosenstein, in her interview, that he was aware she was suicidal. In her last letter to Dr. Beuscher, dated 4 February 1963, Plath gave a complex and detailed description of her mental state, although she failed to mention Dr. Horder's involvement in her health crisis and the medication she was taking. Dr. Beuscher was not, primarily, an analyst or a therapist, but a psychiatrist with a solid pharmacological training. It is possible to assume that Dr. Beuscher would have been reluctant to interfere with the treatment prescribed by another doctor, although she was the one with more legitimacy to prescribe such drugs.

Plath's letter is eloquent and revelatory as far as her mindset is concerned. On the one hand, she mentions practical aspects regarding her difficult new life and the challenges it posed. On the other, she clearly stated her struggle to gain access to psychiatric medical help: "No-one can save me but myself, but I need help & my doctor is referring me to a woman psychiatrist",[10] Plath wrote to Beuscher a week before she died. Her last letter reveals that she was "living on sleeping pills & nerve tonic"[11] and directly described the unfolding of a major breakdown: "I feel I need a ritual for survival from day to day until I begin to grow out of this death".[12] Her work provided her with some minimal satisfaction, despite the dire context: "poems very good but, I feel written on the edge of madness".[13] A few lines further she clearly states what she meant by fearing "the worst": paralyzing, debilitating depression that would make her non-functional, absent from her children's lives, a burden to all: "I am scared to death I shall just pull up the psychic shroud & give up there is this damned, self-induced freeze"; freezing is mentioned again a few lines later – "keep slipping into this pit of panic & deepfreeze", yet she seemed to still hope to „grow out of this death"[14].

On 22 January, Plath wrote to Olive Higgins Prouty, her longtime supporter and benefactor. A successful writer with a personal history of mental difficulties, Mrs. Prouty had paid an extravagant amount for Plath's treatment at McLean Hospital in 1953 and continued to occasionally send her checks to keep her afloat financially. Since he trusted her older, more experienced friend, she gave her details about her medical status, mentioning that she missed her sessions with Dr. Beuscher, who had treated her both at McLean and privately, in 1958–1959, while Plath was with Hughes in Boston. Olive Prouty had met Dr. Beuscher personally when, in late autumn 1953, she pleaded with Plath's McLean doctors to intensify their care and pay closer attention to her case. In her letter to Prouty, Plath suggests that, ideally, Dr. Horder and Dr. Beuscher, should complement each other in the care she received from both: "My doctor here---my old doctor---has been a source of great help to me (I am still on sleeping pills & tonics to help me eat), but I do occasionally miss that wonderful Doctor Ruth Beuscher I had at McLean's who I feel could help me so much now. She did write me a letter or two, very helpful, but it's not the same as those hours of talk".[15] It is obvious that, instead of a parallelism in which Dr. Horder provided Plath with the medical care a General Practitioner was supposed to offer while Dr. Beuscher focused on her psychiatric illness, a more complex intersection of competences and involvements occurred. Dr. Horder might have acted out of a more personal motivation – as a former psychiatric patient suffering from depression, he was aware of the dynamics and pitfalls of Plath's episode. This might explain his willingness to alleviate her insomnia with sleeping pills, then wake her up with „nerve tonic", in fact a "pep pill" that might have contained amphetamines: "It is such a relief to be back with my wonderful and understanding Doctor Horder. He has given me a very good tonic to help me eat more, is checking my weight—I lost about 20 pounds this summer—and has sent me to have a chest x-ray after hearing of my 103° fevers, so I am in the best of hands …"[16]

On 4 February, Plath wrote her mother a reassuring letter, thanking her for the invitation to go back home to America and her family, but firmly stating her desire to stay in London and fight for professional recognition and a less turbulent version of family life. Without concealing her rough period – "I have been feeling a bit grim"[17]– she proceeded as she usually did with her mother: she

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[10] Plath, *The Letters*, 881.
[11] Plath, *The Letters*, 881.
[12] Plath, *The Letters*, 881.
[13] Plath, *The Letters*, 881.
[14] Plath, *The Letters*, 881.
[15] Plath, *The Letters*, 873.
[16] Sylvia Plath, *Letters Home* (London: Faber & Faber, 2010), 486.
[17] Plath, *Letters Home*, 490.

reassured her that, despite some difficulties, she was actively fighting to overcome them and had multiple strategies and plans for the future. She was coherent and focused, loving and hopeful. "I am going to start seeing a woman doctor", she wrote, omitting to mention this doctor was a psychiatrist, and immediately mentioned that medical care was free on the National Health, "to whom I've been referred by my very good local doctor, which should help me weather this difficult time. Give my love to all".[18]

Her suicide in February 1963 was preceded by months of mental decline. In the autumn of 1962, as Sylvia Plath made great efforts to face mutual friends who knew her marital troubles with Ted Hughes, her emotional state was deteriorating. She suffered from insomnia: "I do have to take sleeping pills", she wrote to her mother on September 1962, "but they are, just now, a necessary evil and enable me to sleep deeply and then do some writing".[19] On 12 October, she wrote her brother Warren and her sister-in-law Maggie a short but honest letter, in which she bluntly declared: "Just now I am a bit of a wreck, bones literally sticking out all over and great, black shadows under my eyes from sleeping pills".[20] She also confided in friends, and the detail about the sleeping pills surfaces in letters to Kathy Kane (29 September 1962) – "The evenings are hell. I can't sleep without pills"[21] or to Dorothy "Dotti" Benotti, "I hope to get off sleeping pills as soon as I get through the first week or so fixing this place up".[22] By the end of the year, she was aware of her addiction to them – "I am going to the doctor this week to see if he can help me get off these sleeping pills I've been taking every night & am now addicted to",[23] she wrote to Daniel & Helga Huws, on 26 December. Plath trusted Dr. Horder and was convinced that, despite some obvious drawbacks, his medical decisions were meant to improve her health. In the days before her death, he called her friends to inquire about her health He had found her a bed in a psychiatric hospital, and she was supposed to be admitted the day she ended her life. In an interview from 1970–1971, with Harriet Rosenstein, Dr. John Horder said of his involvement in Plath's case: "I knew that this was going to be, so to speak, a handful…. she'd had a tremendous blow, and I was going to see quite a bit of her. But she wasn't clinically depressed and certainly not suicidal to the best of my knowledge when she returned. Indeed, I remember her being pleased even in the week before her death about a BBC assignment…She wasn't assuming Ted would come back. She was planning a life with the two children".[24] In the essay that sparked an enormous interest in Plath's life and death, *The Savage God, A Study of Suicide* (1972), Al Alvarez remembered Dr. Horder as a compassionate professional who had had his fair share or adversity in life: his depressive episodes were so debilitating that he had been discharged from the British military during World War II.[25] However, it is unclear if Alvarez's assumption is accurate – "He prescribed sedatives and arranged for her to see a psychotherapist",[26] as he tried to make arrangements for a more coherent treatment plan and have Plath enter the care of psychiatrists. A letter from a female psychiatrist (as Plath expressly requested) arrived too late, due to a mishap. Although he declared he hadn't read Plath's poetry at the time and was unfamiliar with her writerly work, he was familiar with art, as he was "an accomplished pianist and painter, and had a particular sympathy for artists".[27]As a former psychiatric patient who had battled depression, Dr. Horder was aware of the benefits of medication, therefore prescribed Plath either Nardil or Parnate[28] as he declared, without much precision, in interviews following the writer's death.

Despite his obvious interest to help his patient (he even instructed Plath's friend, Jillian Becker, to help Plath moderately with childcare activities, so that "she must feel that she's absolutely necessary".[29] Horder failed to understand the depth of Plath's depression and the danger of the cocktail of drugs she took in the final week of her life. As Heather Clark described, in the days

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[18] Plath, *Letters Home*, 490.
[19] Plath, *Letters Home*, 457.
[20] Plath, *Letters Home*, 461.
[21] Plath, *The Letters*, 772.
[22] Plath, *The Letters*, 851.
[23] Plath, *The Letters*, 860.
[24] Dr. John Horder cited in Clark, *Red Comet*, 1093.
[25] Al. Alvarez, *The Savage God: A Study on Suicide* (London: Bloomsbury, 1971), 34.
[26] Alvarez, *The Savage God*, 34.
[27] Clark, *Red Comet*, 1138.
[28] Clark, *Red Comet*, 1138.
[29] Jillian Becker, *Giving Up: The Last Days of Sylvia Plath* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2003), 14.

preceding her death, Plath took "two amphetamines (the antidepressant and Drinamyl), one opioid (codeine), and one barbiturate (Drinamyl), as well as an unknown medicine for her respiratory illness".[30] Paradoxically, the medication that was supposed to improve her mental health possibly had a negative impact and gave her enough energy to act upon her self-destructive impulses. In the interview he gave Rosenstein, Horder clearly mentioned that monoamine oxidase inhibitors could have this effect in the first weeks of treatment.[31] The London GP's memories of Plath's final days are eloquently narrated in this interview, seven years after the writer's death. Still troubled by an inescapable sense of guilt, Dr. Horder did not hesitate to tackle the sensitive issue of Plath's motherhood, claiming that it inadvertently interfered with her healthcare options. Alone, struggling financially and mentally, her obvious priority was the well-being of her children. Dr. Horder mentions the relevance of this unfortunate circumstance, in which Plath was unable to admit herself into a hospital to rest and recuperate before her depression worsened, and he also mentions that he had hoped her love for the children would be stronger than her compulsion to die. He had been aware of her suicidal crisis for about a week before she took her life, therefore arranged that she spent time alone as little as possible – "I knew she was suicidal for certainly a week before it happened".[32]

The doctor's remorseful evocation touches upon the complex relationship between biography and writing in one of his most problematic confessions – that if he had read Plath's work, he would have had her committed to a psychiatric unit, even against her will.[33] The abundance of suicide references in Plath's work, added to her deteriorating mental state appear to have constituted a strong argument for the doctor to act more decisively in order to save her. However, he did not consider at the time that she was in imminent danger to act upon her suicidal ideation. It is difficult to assess Dr. Horder's degree of familiarity with the clinical notion of "suicidal crisis"[34] – that is the specific interval in which the patient was at high risk to commit suicide - or, in scientific terms, "an acute, high- intensity, negative affect state that may serve as a trigger for a suicide attempt".[35]

Although he was the last medical professional who saw Plath, Dr. Horder was not invoked in the violent accusatory comments of the writer's family in the aftermath of her death. Dr. Beucsher, on the other hand, was as Galynker states, "in the eyes of the patient's loved ones, the medical profession, and the law, during this time it is the clinician who last saw the patient alive who bears the responsibility for the suicide, should it occur".[36]

Ruth and Sylvia

While Sylvia Plath's relationship with Dr. Horder was close, based on her trust and his altruistic professional dedication, the one she developed with Dr. Beuscher was more convoluted and, at times, eliciting a personal dimension rather than a medical one. If Plath used to see and phone Dr. Horder, thus having a direct, unmediated relationship with him, her connection to Dr. Beuscher was distanced, although profoundly verbal and narrative. Along with her massive correspondence with family, friends and literary peers, Plath's letters to Dr. Beuscher are part of a personal dimension of her oeuvre that indispensably illuminates all others. The recent opening of important archives at Maryland and Emory University offered researchers new opportunity to explore the complex relationship between the American writer and her psychiatrist. Not only Plath's fourteen letters to Beuscher attest to the strong bond between the two women, but also the less visible narrative of Beuscher's replies to Plath, which remained, to this day, unpublished. However, Dr. Ruth Beuscher disclosed to Rosenstein important details regarding Plath's treatment at Mclean under her supervision, and she also discussed the contents of some of Plath's letters to her from the late 1950s. In an interview she gave this researcher she comments on the sexual aspects Plath had shared with her in their correspondence, connecting the particular manner in which Plath expressed her views on sex to

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[30] Clark, *The Red Comet*, 1136.

[31] Harriet Rosenstein, interview with John Horder, 1970, interview MSS 1489, Emory University.

[32] Rosenstein, interview with Horder.

[33] Rosenstein, interview with Horder.

[34] Igor Galynker, *The Suicidal Crisis: Clinical Guide to the Assessment of Imminent Suicide Risk* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 1.

[35] Herbert Hendin et al. "Factors Contributing to Therapists' Distress After the Suicide of a Patient," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 161, no. 8 (2004): 1442– 1446.

[36] Galinker, *The Suicidal Crisis*, 1.

her education at Smith College and to a certain "vulgarity" (in Barnhouse's words, "Hugh Hefner-type explicit").[37] As Rosenstein asked for more details about the reason she felt Plath's manner was "inappropriate", the psychiatrist replied "the vocabulary was wrong, and the emphasis was wrong and the context was wrong"; "She talked about it as though it didn't matter who she was with".[38] Moreover, Dr. Beuscher shares some of her therapy notes with Rosenstein, reading her some observations she made during her sessions with Plath from 1954 and 1958. They mainly concern Plath's relationship with her mother and her early sexual experiences, but they also offer some insight into her mental state.

Beuscher is a cardinal presence in the Rosenstein archive and in all the other private documents detailing the final years of Plath's life and work. There is only a small part remaining of a larger correspondence between the psychiatrist and the writer – Plath's fourteen letters from the 1960–1963 period, and only two letters from Beuscher to Plath, both included in the Sophia Smith Colletion at Smith College, Plath's Alma Mater. There is an obviously shifting attitude visible in what we can imagine was Dr. Beuscher's relationship with her former patient: in her letter to Plath, she was friendly and generous in offering advice that could work like anchors, preventing Sylvia from drowning into the despair she often mentioned and dreaded. In the interview she gave Rosenstein, she seems willing to help the prospective biographer to set the record straight on Plath's psychiatric state and in general, on her life. Later, though, in an interview she gave Alex Beam, she described Plath as "mean".[39] There is, quite evidently, a contrast between the doctor's "direct" dialogue with Plath and her narratives about her in the period following the writer's death. Her letters to Plath faithfully reflect a certain firmness in the tonality of her advice-giving manner, a friendly, yet somewhat distant attitude that she balances with a direct declaration of affection at the end, like a signature that would transcend decades of bitter regret. Beuscher's name would be irrevocably bound to her patient's, as Plath's death would loom large over her doctor's collapsing marriage and professional becoming.[40]

Sylvia Plath probably wrote Ruth Beuscher more than the fourteen letters (covering the period between 18 February 1960, and 4 February 1963) that are now part of "the Rosenstein archive" at Emory University – a significant body of materials that never materialized into a biography of the writer. Beuscher repeatedly declared that their correspondence was quite large, although only sixteen letters, in total, survived. Besides Plath's evident need for Beuscher's stabilizing presence in her life, one could easily notice the aggravation of her tone as her crisis deepened and spiralled out of control. The writer tried to define Beuscher's role in clearer terms – she needed her as a professional whose authority she felt compelled to respect, but also a female friend – "I am really asking your help as a woman, the wisest woman emotionally and intellectually, that I know".[41] In order to achieve that, she suggested they transform their correspondence into paid sessions between doctor and patient. As a professional, Plath was certainly aware of the significance of certain codes, despite the striking difference between in-person therapy and asynchronous dialogue in correspondence. It might be rightfully speculated that Plath tried to manage her major crisis (the demise of her marriage and the challenging life as a single mother) by seeking help from a professional whom she trusted. Plath seemed desperate enough to imagine that a financial transaction would help her resume her role as Beuscher's patient: "Nobody else is any good to me, I'm sick of preamble. That's why I thought if I paid for a couple of letters I might start going ahead instead of in circles".[42] As the difficult autumn months of 1962 unfolded, she sensed this need more acutely: "I'd be awfully grateful just to have a postcard from you saying you think any paid letter sessions between us are impractical or unhelpful or whatever, but something final. Believe me, that would be a relief. It is the feeling of writing into a void that never answers, or may at any moment answer, that is difficult".[43] Beuscher's answer, in September 1962, firmly discouraged this line of action, furthermore, she declared she had been disconcerted by Plath's request. Her advice came in the form of axiomatic formulations - common

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[37] Harriet Rosenstein, interview with Ruth Tiffany Beuscher, 1970, interview MSS 1489, Emory University.
[38] Rosenstein, interview with Beuscher.
[39] Alex Beam, interview with Ruth Tiffany Barnhouse, 1997, The Sylvia Plath Archives, Smith College; Beam wrote *Gracefully Insane: Life and Death in America's Premier Mental Hospital*, New York: Public Affairs, 2009.
[40] Karen Maroda, "Sylvia and Ruth," *Salon*, 29 November 2004.
[41] Plath, *The Letters*, 762.
[42] Plath, *The Letters*, 754.
[43] Plath, *The Letters*, 753.

sense observations followed by unequivocal opinions over how Plath should navigate her separation from Hughes, insisting to make her aware that the crisis did not define her identity and life. Plath had thoroughly informed Beuscher of the details surrounding the affair Ted Hughes had with Assia Wevill, expressing her violently negative feelings without restraint. Plath partially does the work of the analyst in her letters and dutifully dissects the situation, exploring her powerful, uncontrollable need for validation and affection – "For fear he would desert me forever, like my father, if I didn't watch him closely enough".[44] Her retreat into immaturity is visible in her fixation on the woman Hughes had an affair with, Assia Wevill, apparently ignoring the central cause of her marital woes – Hughes' betrayal and emotional abandonment: "What has this Weavy Asshole got that I haven't, I thought: she can't make a baby (and really isn't so sorry), can't make a book or a poem, just ads about bad bakery bread, wants to die before she gets old & loses her beauty, and is bored".[45] The letters following the fateful day in July 1962 when Plath discovered the affair detail the same dichotomy: Ted Hughes' desertion and the ways in which it reopened older wounds – her father's death, the suicidal crisis of 1953, her insecurities and difficult familial relationships. A violent clash of emotions becomes visible, and the same extremes are revealed in her poetry from that period, as if her literary art registered and transfigured life events into the essential acts and episodes of a personal mythology. It is now well-known that Sylvia Plath's posthumous life often seems to alter the order and meaning of her lived life. There is a vast amount of scholarship constantly remapping the connection between her life and her work, blurring the boundaries of biographical account and scholarly investigation. It is the mission of the changing generations of biographers to approximate the truth and meaning of Plath's life and sensibility, one that speaks meaningfully to an increasingly wider audience.

Conclusions

Six decades after Sylvia Plath's death, her works, the literature produced about them, and her life form a unique edifice in modern literature. Since the opening of other archival resources in recent years, scholars have gained access to new information about (in Heather Clark's accurate formulation) her "short life and blazing art" (Clark 2020). The medical element and her relationship with her doctors form a distinct chapter in a complex narrative, one that paradoxically reveals and conceals the source of her confessional paradigm. In a sense, both doctors were contaminated by the tragic element governing Plath's essential story, one that reunites life and work into a single edifice. The way in which their relationship impacted the writer's final months and, implicitly, her work in that period remain a central interest to Plath scholars, worthy of re-readings and reinterpretation.

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[44] Plath, *The Letters*, 738.
[45] Plath, *The Letters*, 738.

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C. REVIEWS

BOOK REVIEW

A PERSONAL FORAY THROUGH HISTORY, LIFE AND CINEMA.
Mihaela Grancea, *Istorie şi film [History and Film],* Argonaut/Mega, Cluj-Napoca, 2021, 135 p.

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I would like to draw your attention to a literary publication that operates on the multidisciplinary border of history and film, published by Mega and Argonaut publishing houses and authored by Mihaela Grancea, *History and film*, with the subtitle *Cultural history studies*. Relatively short, spanning one hundred and twenty pages, the book is nonetheless extremely condensed. Mihaela Grancea proposes an ambitious journey which starts sometime in the Middle Ages, populated by the hajduks, and finishes around the end of the Romanian communist *Golden Age*, when the illegality of abortion negatively influenced the existence of many women, and left them traumatized to this day.

The author starts from the premise that "artistic film, for many of us, is a place of our affective memory" (p. 6). Using films with a historical substratum, Mihaela Grancea presents us with an archaic Romania such as recent generations have never seen before, because it has been almost forgotten by the collective imaginary, due to its absence from public debates. It is a somewhat peripheral Romania. Why? Because it is less visible, less accessible: outlaws, renegades, minorities, revolutionaries, miners, labourers, women without any protection, new-borns doomed to perish, all with ancestral problems. It is a world of shadows, but – despite the heavy dust, sometimes cloudy, sometimes stifling – not grey at all. It is a colourful, speckled world, set in the historical regions of Romania: predominantly Wallachia and Transylvania, worlds in which the author has lived – as she confesses in her personal introduction. A journey that began in Bucharest, somewhere near a C.A. Rosetti Square full of chestnut trees, continued in the Braşov area – Făgăraş, Cincu commune –, via Slatina, Cluj-Napoca, Alba Iulia, and settled in Sibiu.

The book deals with the Romanian cinematography of the Ceauşescu regime, but it is not content to remain only there, because its journey covers Central, Southern and Eastern Europe: Hungary, Slovakia, Yugoslavia, Poland, Greece, Albania, Russia, etc. Regardless of the provenance, the starting point would be that: "film production also functioned as de-frustrating fiction, because film, more than the other arts, is multifunctional, fulfilling a compensatory function" (p. 9). Through adventure films, melodramas, comedies: "the general need for entertainment and the more mercantile orientations of the system were met" (p. 17). Forms of abuse, ideological struggles between "good" and "evil", the imposition of those in positions of power over personal destinies are other topics touched by the author. The writing is infectious in its search for this marginality, sensitively unfolded page by page.

Mihaela Grancea´s book is structured chronologically. Chapter one begins somewhere in the 16th century, around the time of Baba Novac, coming leisurely two or three hundred years into the present, focusing on "rebels, outlaws, villains, damned souls", "delinquents", "thieves, highway robbers, criminals", "rascals" (p. 13): "The bandit is, by definition, the classic rural outlaw" (p. 9). They are outlaws, but not once they collaborate with the leaders of the time, facilitating harsh, unequal and illegal solutions to narrow situations. They can be likened to efficient mercenaries, slickly created, attractive to the viewer. They are people who operate without regard to rules, which, in turn, do not apply to them.

The author manages to go through the entire genre of the Hajduk film and researches it with skill. Along the way, she also gives examples of productions from Romania's neighbours (such as Hungary, Slovakia, Albania, Serbia, Moldova, etc.), which she analyses convincingly, offering a clear argument: this type of production has a local air, specific to "Central and Eastern Europe" (p. 9). The comparison with the Western genre, of Occidental origin, becomes logical, and – in this entire broad context – the author identifies how narratives and intentions change from one communist decade to the next. However, some features do remain the same: "The heroes are usually recruited from the rural

world, being tall, vulture-like men, expressions of virility. This is the male prototype in Hungarian, Romanian, Slovak, Albanian, Serbian, Moldovan films" (p. 18). We can thus better understand the common purpose of the ideology of the cinema in these countries, but also the nuances that distinguish and particularise the various national discourses. The author's meticulous characterizations follow the entire text and are highly visual and immersive. The attention given to character description is particularly enlightening. The connections made open other potential discussions concerning certain archetypes and specificities: "In general, in Western films, but also in Romanian or Hungarian films of the genre, the hero is rarely a very young one. Such a preference derives from the belief that only an experienced individual, hardened in previous confrontations, can devote himself to social justice; he must also have tried the status of a villain, be it a cowboy or a wanderer who overcomes his condition: usually, the sheriff or the vigilante gunslinger is a repentant villain, a *convert* (...) their physical portrait being inspired more by the American western than by the popular tradition. *Anghel Şaptecai* and *Mărgelatu*, the Serbian *Kondik*, the Albanian and Hungarian hajduks have an impenetrable face, a stern expression that exudes confidence and masculinity. They have a particular gait, seemingly swaying and arrogant, an austere if not silky outfit, a specific body language." (p. 32).

Predictably enough, the (anti?)heroes of these stories are likened to Robin Hood. Who are they fighting against? Through the structure of their experience, they become – in varying doses – vehicles of communist propaganda with a nationalist rhetoric, fighters for social and historical justice (p. 22); they confront – in an altruistic way – the exploiters of the age, the Phanariot landlords, the clerical representatives, etc. The outlaw is a necessary evil: "the victim of his excesses, his passion, he is the tribute to a traditional norm, but also to the sensualism promoted by the romantics. He experiences all the pleasures dreamed of by the rural world constrained by the norm and poverty: endless feasts, eroticism, the manifestation of an ego that is not in keeping with the social status of origin" (p. 34). It is precisely for this reason that the outlaw – as a typology – ultimately "achieves, through his own death, the popular epos of heroism" (p. 20). Therefore, when he does not survive – but only after he has established class equality – the public will not mourn him. His sacrifice is valorised and creates mental bridges with the communist *illegalists* of the troubled interwar period – another cinematic category that can be analysed using the model proposed by Mihaela Grancea.

The entire journey of the first chapter is fascinating. The author's text opens up worlds, convinces with its analytical force, but also with the style and refinement with which she characterizes the different characters, nuanced contextualization of their stories, precise identifications of the resources and motives that drive them into battle.

The links made between the scripts of these films, which often manipulate the historical event, and the medieval reality in which they are set is, again, a strength of the analysis. After lengthy excursions, stretching over several pages, in which the author explores the films and identifies similar elements in them, we are invited to read pieces dedicated to historical reality, designed to clarify certain real events and contexts. This is where the historian's professional training comes in. In the introduction, the author points out this danger of reconstruction, whether cinematographic, literary or mental: "A particular feature of collective memory is the systematic idealisation of the past, the operation being closely linked to its instrumentalisation for political, pedagogical and ideological reasons and purposes (...) The book that fictionalises history, but also the scientific book, the film, all these cultural products, propose a subjective reading of the past. There are, obviously, changes of meaning, reinventions, mystifications carried out as a result of political order (in non-democratic regimes) or as a result of the subjective impulse and aims of the makers of the cultural product" (p. 5).

Mihaela Grancea points out that after the fall of communism, the genre becomes abandoned, with sporadic exceptions in the 90s and a solitary return, *Aferim!* (2015, dir. Radu Jude), of more recent date.

The second chapter – which can also be a stand-alone article, like the others, although together they build a chronological thread – remains in the distant past centuries. More precisely, it is set in the time of the *Paşoptist* (1848) revolution, a major historical event present in the cinematographic discourse of both Romania and Hungary. Mihaela Grancea relies on this comparison: "In Romanian and Hungarian historiographies, competing historiographies, in the official discourses on the two projects of the *Paşoptist* identity in Transylvania, apparently incompatible and antagonistic projects that generated a bloody civil war, Romanians and Hungarians were, and are, concerned with what we call the responsibility of the precedent for genocidal acts; the blame is always placed, especially in

memorial and historiographical discourse, on the *Other*. Filmic discourse, on the other hand, merely sidesteps *sensitive subjects*" (p. 57).

On the Romanian side, two titles were identified: *La răscrucea marilor furtuni* [*At the Crossroads of Great Storms*] (1980, dir. Mircea Moldovan) – "an epic film with too many monologues and dialogues with an explanatory role (especially in claustrophobic interiors). This general aspect was perhaps also imposed by the low production budget." (p. 64) – and *Munți în flăcări* [*Mountains in Flames*] (1980, dir. Mircea Moldovan). As the author argues: "The script claims that in 1848, first and foremost, the 3 million Romanians, mostly serfs, *demand their nationality*. However, naturally, the peasantry was mainly interested in liberation from serfdom, the national project being secondary. In the film, Avram Iancu is a young man who is sceptical about the imperialists' *bag of promises*. In reality, Avram Iancu was an exalted champion of the Romanian cause and a loyal citizen of the empire." (p. 67). In addition, the author mentions other productions that are set around this decisive event for the geography of present-day Romania, wishing to show how the Romanian space of the 19th century is portrayed in the cinematography of the time.

Crossing the border, she identifies in Petőfi Sándor an "eponymous figure in several productions of cultural consumption (...) against the background of a national impetus that was reconciled with the internationalist one, *Föltámadott a tenger /The Sea has Revolted/S-a trezit marea* (...) as the fruit of Hungarian cultural assimilation, through youth, sacrifice, romantic profile and social belief, the poet Petőfi Sándor was ideal for his reintegration into the pantheon of the Hungarian nation. This justifies his popularity as a historical figure" (pp. 73-74). Without going into too much detail, what the author does can be seen as a balanced and necessary recovery of a historical outcome that we are often inclined to take for granted without questioning further.

The third chapter comes even closer to our times, addressing a highly sensitive topic in Romanian society, Roșia Montană. The focus is on *Nunta de piatră* [*Stone Wedding*] (1973) and *Duhul aurului* [*Lust for Gold*] (1974) (co-directed by Dan Pița and Mircea Veroiu): "The two directors have reconstructed fragments of social life in a Transylvanian mining town in the pre-war period. They tried to reimagine the geo-symbolic and anthropological space of the locality in the Apuseni Mountains, a space represented, in particular, by the ancient settlement of Roșia Montană, which was in itself a film set that made it unnecessary to build sets in the Buftea Studios, on the set, to recreate fragments of the historical structure of the burg" (p. 86). The author presents the hard lives of the locals and identifies sources of inspiration for Pița and Veroiu: *Mineritul în Țara Moților, Munții Apuseni* [*Mining in the Țara Moților, the Apuseni Mountains*] (1939 dir. Paul Călinescu, documentary) which "still preserves elements of the economy and social life of the early 20th century" (p. 92) and "Agârbiceanu's prose [which] was just an opportunity, a pretext. If the writer-priest's narratives are visibly ethicist, the films too sometimes elude morally motivated ends" (p. 94). Again, the text convinces with its strong argumentation, but also with the careful analytical description of these two medium-length films: "As an artistic achievement, *Stone Wedding* is focused on aesthetic expression, on essentialization, on the rendering of symmetries, on revealing the aridity of human nature in comparison with the poetry of things. But, in fact, the life of the woman in *Fefeleaga* is a tragedy drawn as if from ancient matter, determining the cinematography; the few words, the simple but essential gestures express, with a clarity that is hard to achieve, the decency with which Maria (nicknamed Fefeleaga because she always seemed burdened, morose) goes through the last acts of her (sic!) tragedy: the death of Păunița, her last child, and the parting with the horse she sells to dress her deceased daughter in a wedding dress). Maria is an outcast (a poor, widowed, destitute woman) who silently exits life" (p. 98).

A solid connection can thus be made between Fefeleaga and the protagonists of the next (and last) chapter of the book, as double victims: of the repressive communist state and at the same time of the ban on abortion, almost regardless of the situation. Here, Mihaela Grancea begins with a historical contextualization of what happened in the wake of Decree 770/1966, continuing with a discussion of the moralist fiction *Ilustrate cu flori de câmp* [*Picture Postcards with Wild Flowers*] (1974, dir. Andrei Blaier) and the introspective documentary *Născuți la comandă. Decrețeii* [*Children of the Decree*] (2005, dir. Florin Iepan). She then moves forward analysing the intense *4 luni, 3 săptămâni și 2 zile* [*4 months, 3 weeks and 2 days*] (2007, dir. Cristian Mungiu).

In *432*, Otilia and Găbiță are the characters traumatized by this aberration that contravenes human rights. Writing about Mungiu's film, the author makes some original remarks and identifies

nuances that better contextualise the Cannes award-winning director's historical reconstruction. Although it seems impossible, given how much has the film been discussed, Mihaela Grancea manages to bring original ideas to bear on Mungiu's work, which she says "gave priority attention to inter-human relations, communism being only the context. A repressive context. The constraints derived from the communist norm make the characters' choices limited. But these constraints are accepted, no one denounces the repressive nature of society, the victims do not revolt, even though they are victims in the true sense of the word; they accept, fatalistically, the joyless society, the culture of fear that affects the filmmaker today" (p. 119).

The end of the chapter, which also functions as a conclusion – an underlining or even an opening of an idea – refers to the "exorcising" function (p. 124) of art in general. Could this book also be equivalent to a process of exorcising the author's fears and interests regarding films, history, but equally life and death in general? A closer look at its message suggests a positive answer.

BOOK REVIEW

Corneliu Pintilescu, Roger Pârvu (ed.), *Cultura vizuală în România comunistă – Între tendințe de liberalizare și restricțiile stalinismului târziu [Visual culture in Communist Romania – Between tendencies of liberalisation and late-Stalinist restrictions]*, **Mega, Cluj-Napoca, 2022, 501 p.**

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To understand how communism worked in the Eastern Bloc, visual culture represents an interpretative dimension at least as important as the component of politics and the planned economy. Visual propaganda was very important in the functioning communist states. In other words, society is subjected to a number of visual stimuli through: television, press, film projections, also marches organized during national holidays, a wide range of symbols that functioned as factors of change; a restructuration of human values according to socialist ideological perceptions. Therefore, concern about the dynamics of visual culture helps us to complete the puzzle of a reality that was intended to be the highest form of human cohabitation.

The present volume comprises a series of independent studies that complement each other, respectively managed to create a picture of the visual culture of communist Romania. Moreover, one of the purposes of this collective work is to provide a model, a reading grid of the entire area and cultural context where communism was the unofficial state religion.

The context in which this collection was born is worth knowing. Financed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Germany, the pillars of support for this large-scale project are the Hanns Seidel Foundation and the Evangelical Academy of Transylvania. In the cultural headquarters of the latter mentioned institution, during the years 2018-2021, two conferences were held with a fundamental role for the conception of the current work: in the period of 15-16 November 2019, the proposed theme was *Visual culture and propaganda in the 20th century*; respectively from 17 to 19 September 2021 with the theme called *Dictatorial regimes, law and citizens' rights in the XX century*. The authors of the studies contained in the pages of this volume participated with their research in these round tables. The experts present a wide spectrum of professional formation. Some of them have completed doctoral studies in history, others in journalism or political science and they are currently professors or research scientists.

A major relevance in bringing together the ten studies is the coherent organization in four sections. Studies point out the creation of cultural layers according to the chronology and evolution of the political regime in Romania. Moreover, ideological exchanges between West and East were a reality of the time, as demonstrated in this volume. The general idea that can be drawn from all the studies in the volume is that cultural developments, filmmaking techniques and design created a breach in the Iron Curtain. In accordance with the theory of communicating vessels, communist authorities in Romania attempted to leave the impression of liberalization in the visual arts and of a modernization in line with the innovations of the time. It is precisely this main idea that we can find in the narrative thread of events; the impression of a society that seems flexible, but which in fact is ideologically controlled and seeps through this visual culture into the structure of human values. People's lives are therefore depicted in this continuous movement, *pantha rhee,* led by a conductor, in the case of Romania – Nicolae Ceauşescu, accompanied by an orchestra: the party and the subjects around him. Before reviewing the predominant aspects of each section, I would like to point out that this volume is not intended to be exhaustive and that it does not include references to all the resources and instruments of visual culture. On the contrary, this book is a good guide for understanding some cultural changes in communist Romania and beyond that timeframe. At the same time, by the way the authors have chosen the way of writing their studies, it can be commented that this volume is not only addressed to those who are in the field of history and related sciences, but also to the general public passionate about the mosaic of visual expressions transformed into the kaleidoscope of the time.

All the articles have multiple sources of documentation. An increased focus can be observed on primary archival sources, with preference for files within ACNIS (Arhivele Naționale Istorice Centrale) and ACNSA (Arhiva Consilului Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității). Moreover, throughout the volume, suggestive images are inserted depicting in the form of portraits, electoral posters, mechanisms of new industrial techniques in the production of household items, including graphics that leave a first-hand testimony of how the visual impacted the grid of human values economically, politically and socially. These evocative illustrations help the reader understand and form a clearer image about the different forms of visual culture in the second half of the last century. Although it is a bilingual volume, written in Romanian and German, references to a series of books or studies in German are limited. On the one hand, this deficiency can be explained by the small number of articles and other writings in German dealing with communist Romania, especially concerning the under-explored parts of culture and visual propaganda. On the other hand, in order to explain the attitudes of national minorities and their relationship with a culture that was supposed to be "total", relevant references are made to those respective works in German. Overall, the multitude of sources used does nothing but to demonstrate the academic standard.

The two studies that make up the first section manage to frame an initial picture of the tensions in the first postwar decade. A first moment of shock in the Eastern Bloc was precisely the imminent rupture between Tito and Stalin. Corneliu Pintilescu briefly captures the gap between the two leaders after 1948 and Stalin's struggle against the "conspirationists". The political element carried over from this conflict led to the formation of a "non-aligned syndrome". Hence, this study explains to us the importance of cartoons and posters as part of the visual elements of ideological and political condemnation. These practices were also widespread to other communist states, Pintilescu providing a series of suggestive examples from publicity in Romania. In order to understand the major role of the image, Iuliana Cindrea-Nagy proposes a version reading of the portrait of Orthodox bishop faithful of the old calendar Glicherie Tănase. The author of the study conveys an idea with a strong message: the communist regime tried to eradicate any method of spreading and creating "false idols". Absence becomes presence no matter how much the *Securitate* organs have tried to control this marginal community of believers. The manipulation of visual products specifically a photo of a religious leader in arrest, has had quite another refraction in society. The image became a symbol of hope. In other words, the two studies presented complement each other and bring to the fore a contrasting component: visual symbols can be instrumentalized for a purely political purpose, yet they contribute to generating a spirit of rebellion, resistance and unity among people.

The second section translates into words the paradigm of the film industry, the ways in which a mass film culture was formed, as an integral part of the learning and indoctrination process, since this type of leisure was preferred during the communist period, both in Romania and, as Antonela Gyöngy demonstrates, in the DDR. For an explanation of the transformations produced in the first two postwar decades, Mihaela Grancea succeeds in describing this genre of film intended for children and young people, little approached in indigenous historiography. With a case study focused on the film cycle, *Aventurile istețului Năică*, the author puts us in front of a story with a moralizing character; an example that was wanted to be received by the citizens. A rebellious child who has refused any submission to his childhood protectors, his parents, discovers the world around him and the challenges of life. The subliminal message of these films is that man in his primordial nature is good, but the environment perverts him. However, the change of the environment, the exodus from village to city, allows the young Năică to integrate into a broad community, in the norms institutionalized by the socialist order.

Onariu Colăcel integrates in his study commentaries on historical films from the communist period and the transition period after 1989. Important to remember is the choice of themes, titles such as: *Dacii* (1966); *Columna* (1968); *Mihai Viteazul* (1971); *Ștefan cel Mare – Vaslui 1475* (1974). All these titles have as their main purpose the mobilization of the public in a patriotic spirit and the acceptance of a millennial national identity continued by communism. The author manages to capture in detail certain remnants from the historical epic of Romanian film after 1989, where he recalls a series of relevant film projects on the subject of rewriting the past: *Restul e tăcere* (2008); *Aferim!* (2015); *Îmi este indiferent dacă în istorie vom intra ca barbari* (2018).

The last study in this section is signed by Antonela Gyöngy and confronts the reader with the reality of the 1960s and the liberalisation of film production. Visual culture becomes a teaching of

protest. This research is based on the concentration on two such films produced during the aforementioned period, in two different geographical spaces. The first movie was by Lucian Pintilie, *Duminică la ora 6* (1966) in RSR, and the second belongs to Frank Beyer, *Königskinder* (1962) in the RDG. The parallel between these two case studies is relevant for understanding the phenomenon beyond the borders of Romanian communism. However, the period of relaxation in visual culture is a limited one, given the implementation of new ideological restrictions in film politics – *Kulltureller Kahlschlag* in the RDG, respectively *Tezele din Iulie 1971* in the RSR. The reason behind the tightening of control in visual culture is related to the strengthening of internal order at the political party level. This conclusion can be extrapolated for all three articles. The directives in modifying the messages provided by films was closely linked to power struggles and ideological factions within the party.

After the studies analysing image, symbols of resistance or oppression, respectively film, the volume shifts its paradigm, and the third section is dedicated exclusively to consumerism, new fashion in terms of hairstyles and architectural or household design. Mirela Duculescu builds her study in a diachronic way, starting from how design evolved in relation to new technological developments in the interwar period and how it evolved during the communist period. Although design specialists and professors tried to keep pace with Western developments, the modernity of the final products was questionable. The economics of the creator-producer-user relations are deficient, which can explain the need for the regime to produce as much as possible.

The second study and the one that concludes this section belongs to Alexandra Bardan. With a bold approach, it manages to integrate the hairstyle in the pledge of changes specific to late socialism (1964-1985). To illustrate the trends in hair transformation is used by the magazine *Coafura*. Even if the socialist style required sobriety, simplicity and some moderation in terms of style, the study shows that there was a number of Western interference, including in the austerity conditions of the 1980s. Western fashion has tried to be copied, if not adapted to the realities of the socialist world. In both studies the information is corroborated with the visual side, thus providing a round view of the „social constructions" in terms of design and fashion.

Finally, suggestively named *Paradoxuri ale stalinismului târziu*, the last section brings together three studies on how Ceaușescu's propaganda has instrumentalized his image nationally in mass demonstrations held on various holidays. Moreover, the last two studies bring to our attention the reforms passed in theatre and television in relation to the Hungarian and German minorities. The first analysis, Manuela Marin's, focuses on the cult of Nicolae Ceaușescu's personality through the image. The author pays increased attention to the visual syntax, the positioning of figures and objects in the image. She also manages to arouse interest in certain recurring practices, such as the involvement of state institutions in changing realities. The example given is the falsification of the photograph that captures the participants in the workers' rally of 1 May 1939 by the subsequent addition of the figures of Ceausescu's wives. This photo was used to brush the image of the Communist leader and the fairy tale of his revolutionary life.

Furthermore, Zsuzsana Plainer's research brings to the fore the role played by the Hungarian community and its relevance in relation to cultural life in communist Romania. Since the 1980s, the Hungarian minority has suffered from the drastic reduction in the number of ethnic Hungarians in party leadership, army and *Securitate*. A redefinition of their state, including cultural, was observed; all Hungarian-language television programs were abolished in 1984. In 1988 a regulation was introduced, prohibiting the use of the Hungarian names of various localities. It was a move tributary to Ceaușescu's project of nationalization and sharing of culture, respectively of the destruction of any unaligned or "alien elements".

What Andreea Zamfira does in the latest study of the section is to reinforce those presented earlier by focusing on the German minority. Cultural uniformity could be achieved through a nation-wide public policy. The examples given of the phasing out of German TV broadcasts are eloquent, all in the context of Security control and the attempt to disseminate a number of ideas related to creating an environment of ethnic unity.

To conclude my considerations on this volume, I would mention a few details about the challenging title of the collective work. Thus, the studies in the volume represent an important source of knowledge regarding visual trends of the time, the communist ideology and its application into all levels of society through jamming, film, design and television. The reference period is an extended

one, for which we can identify the fundamental features of a totalitarian regime, of contradictory currents and tendencies of liberalisation and restriction.

BOOK REVIEW

Valentin Trifescu, *Legături culturale româno-maghiare: Studii și materiale [Romanian-Hungarian literary relations: Studies and Materials]*, prefață de Erika-Mária Tódor, Editura Muzeului Național Brukenthal, Sibiu, 2022, 237 p.

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This volume by the art historian Valentin Trifescu contains a series of personal views on destinies and encounters between creators and interpreters of the World, namely intellectuals that relate differently to the present research topic (i.e., Lajos Balázs, Francisc László, François Bréda etc.) that take the shape of studies, reviews or confessions according to the prefacer, Erika-Mária Tódor (pp. 7-8). In his foreword, the author claims that his research is subjective and seeks to convince no one about anything in the field, claiming that good subjectivity is better than bad objectivity (p. 9).

The first study, "On the Advantages of the Minority Condition in Cultural and Literary Romanian-Hungarian Relations" deals with Transylvania diachronically and the impact the Two World Wars had on the region. According to the author, the Hungarians there were in collective depression (p. 11) due to the shift of authority to Bucharest. It is particularly the reformed priest and author Dezső László (1904-1973) who accurately described cultural realities therein. WWI was an opportunity for Hungarians in Transylvania, claims Dezső László, as they received the condition of minority, hence their ability to create outside Hungary (p. 12). Károly Kós's 1921 manifesto pleaded for the continuation of Hungarian cultural life and identity through work, dignity, resilience and character (p. 13). On the other hand, Romanians went from minority to majority after the 1918 union, without departing from the literary environment they grew into as Ion Chinezu's work testifies (p. 14). Regionalism afforded Hungarian literature from Transylvania to shape its own identity thanks to cultural reviews from towns in the area such as *Erdélyi Helikon* (p. 17). However, Transylvanism lost ground in the 1930s because of the rise of nationalist movements such as the legionary one to whom many intellectuals adhered (p. 18). Al. Dima coined the concept of *creative localism* to account for the plural, mosaic and fragmentary dimension of local peculiarities. The theories of secondary (Virgil Nemoianu) and recessivity (Mircea Florian) have also been brought into play by historians[1] to explain the tension between the centre (Bucharest) and literary provinces (p. 21). V. Trifescu concludes his study with the idea that the research topic has remained mainly one of Hungarian interest lately[2] due to the fact that Romanians do not speak the language, thus expressing nostalgia for an era of bilingualism long passed (p. 23).

The second study tackles Iancu Azapu's Transylvanism which is discussed against the background of the disputes between Budapest and Bucharest concerning the word *Transylvania/ Erdély* (p. 25). It is stressed that during the communist years the historical identity of the province was ignored in literature, whereas geographically it was seen as a distinct space (p. 26). During the interwar years, Iancu Azapu's discourse distinguishes itself as an open one, in which blunt anti-centralist statements are made with respect to the region's independence (p. 29). His opinion was that Romanians from Transylvania developed their cultural and religious traits under the beneficial influence of the Hungarian administration herein (p. 31). Since the end of the 18th century, it could be argued that Transylvania did no longer belong to its people, hence an interruption in its development because of the malevolence of the Habsburg dynasty and of the emperor (p. 32). He demolished the

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[1] See Gheorghe Manolache, *Resurecția localismului creator. O experiență spirituală în Mitteleuropa provinciilor literare* (Sibiu, Editura Universității „Lucian Blaga", 2006), 15.
[2] A seminal work in recent literature is Enikő Pál's *Influența limbii maghiare asupra limbii române. Perioada veche/ The influence of the Hungarian Language on the Romanian Language. The Old Period* (Iași, Editura Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza", 2014).

myth of the good emperor, frowning upon the privileges granted during the enlightened Austrian despotism (p. 33). For I. Azapu, Transylvania belonged to all its inhabitants and Greater Romania simply created enemies that Transylvanian Romanians could have done without (p. 37). The added value to Transylvanism that the paper brings consists, in V. Trifescu's opinion, in Iancu Azapu's deconstructivist view of the main Romanian national myths he simply deems as social movements, as opposed to our mainstream historiography that labelled them as unification ones (p. 40).

The third study focuses on space and regional identity in Károly Kós's work. As an art historian, V. Trifescu argues that, opposite to a centralization policy, regionalism has gradually acquired a negative connotation since the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, and up to the time of the incorporation of Transylvania in the Romanian state. There was rather the case of a *Bierdermeier* type of traditionalism at play (p. 41) and *Secession* artistic creativity (p. 42). There was fear and lack of trust in Romanian criticism on the part of Hungarian writers in Transylvania, according to the author (p. 43). Nowadays, Transylvanism is not rehabilitated in Romanian culture if we consider the main syntheses on Transylvania that came out after 1989 (p. 45). Kós portrays it as an enclosed and unitary space, open to alterity, a true *Heimat* with an intercultural vision of the world (p. 47).

The fourth study discusses Transylvanism in relation to Ion Chinezu as a first approach, claiming that it represented a solution of the minority crisis during Greater Romania with its cultural, political and economic implications; a context in which the reputed literary historian and critic gave an overview of the situation in a publication of the time. He portrayed Romanians from Transylvania as marked by alterity in relation to others (Hungarians and Germans therein) (p. 56). Romanians from those parts had a different path than the ones from other historical regions of Romania (p. 57). He complains about the constraints of centralism in Bucharest in the era of Greater Romania (p. 59). He was the first to write a history of Hungarians from the region, in which he emphasised the positive features of Transylvanism at the level of a minority's literature (p. 60). He also overcame the clichés of Romanian classics such as Caragiale and Slavici who spoke of a conventional capital, a voluntary and moral Transylvania and a tender Moldavia (p. 63). As a nationalist, he had conflicting convictions (p. 65), yet his merits were notable.

The fifth study analyses war poetry and identity issues in the verses written on the battlefield by Romanian soldiers from the Austro-Hungarian army, arguing that the voices of the direct participants to events was considerably less known than the historiography of countries that imposed a national(ist) reading of the past (p. 67). The myth of the good emperor and the feeling of duty were particularly strong among Transylvanian Romanians back then (p. 69). The poetry of literate peasants was naïve, resembling traditional Romanian folklore (p. 77) and depicted their life in war time and in the military (p. 78). Influenced by Alecsandri, their poetry resembles letters in verse in the tradition of George Coşbuc (p. 80). Another Romanian poet who published during WWI claimed that Romanians from Transylvania fought for a cause that was not theirs, as strangers in their own country (p. 82). Some poems had religious connotations (such as the ones of the soldier Vasile Tomuţ) in which there was the idea that war came as punishment for sinful men (p. 83). In military poems, Romanian peasant soldiers engage in dialogue with the emperor asking for his mercy (p. 84), for help or curse him for their fate (p. 85). For them, to be a good Romanian was, nonetheless, to be faithful to the emperor (p. 87).

The sixth article pleads for a comparative history of Alsace and Transylvania, a Mitteleuropa from the Vosges to the Carpathians. V. Trifescu argues that there are many reasons that welcome such a comparison between the two border regions (p. 88). Food history has its say, particularly due to the white wines produced in both provinces (p. 90). Romania was close to France in the 19th and 20th centuries and the Alsace case became a paradigm for Europe after the end of the French-Prussian War (p. 93). Consequently, after 1918, Romanians applied the "Strasbourg model" in the educational system in Transylvania, which meant the nationalization of the Hungarian University of Cluj and its placement on a Romanian base (p. 94). Queen Marie of Romania was awarded the *doctor honoris causa* title by the University of Strasbourg for her writings, a political act, and so was Nicolae Iorga in 1919, after the nationalization of this university. Banat came second in the issue, as Lorraine did with respect to Alsace, another common feature of the two regions (p. 96). Few French authors tackled the national fate of Romanians as part of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy in the 19th century (p. 97). Hungarian authors such as the literary critic and historian Béla Pomogáts argued that a credible

analogy between Alsace and Transylvania cannot be made as two border regions claimed by two neighbouring countries (p. 99). However, the two were compared by Romanian scholars starting with 1909, such as Onisifor Ghibu, who studied for a semester at the Faculty of Letters in Strasbourg (p. 100). It was claimed that there were more differences than similarities since Alsace had no French papers at the time (p. 104). According to V. Trifescu, it was perhaps the French historian Jean-Noël Grandhomme that best grasped the identity issue of the inhabitants of the border provinces, with the syntagm "les soldats d'entre-deux", he coined in a series of conferences[3] he initiated in 2012 (pp. 107-108).

Articles seven and eight are devoted to François Bréda, the former being also related to his appurtenance to Deva where his capabilities of *genius loci* and *egregor* manifested themselves, the latter accounting for methods of survival in the writer's philosophy. Bréda Ferenc was born in Deva and felt that *homo viator* realized that every place had a time of its own (p. 114), the qualitative difference of a journey being given not by the celebrity of the departure or destination, but by a spiritual guideline located on the vertical celestial axis (p. 117). The city of Deva was given a particular aura in the identitarian landscape of Transylvania, in general, and of Hungarian culture, in particular (p. 126). The citadel fulfilled the role of solar clock and barometer for its inhabitants who were thus able to forecast the weather (p. 132). According to the author, existence is a great journey, an external exile, a pilgrimage to celestial Jerusalem to be made with the help of others and through them, never on one's own (p. 139). Breda's opinion was that the written or spoken word was a means that allowed time traveling for the Ego beyond death, the being's soul becoming a word in itself in the afterlife (p. 141).

Article nine presents V. Trifescu's apprenticeship with Francisc László, driven by the credo that a good pedagogue is being oneself, a major encounter under the sign of composer Bela Bartók, as in the case of Fr. Bréda whom the art historian met after a concert at the Cluj Philharmonics in the winter of 2005-2006 (p. 146). Borrowing CDs of contemporary classical music and having long talks with the professor on a weekly basis on composers like Béla Bartók, Richard Oschanitzky, Károly Kós, László Debreczeni, Coriolan Petranu, Aladár Kuncz, Ioan Buşiţia, Felician Brânzeu or Miklós Bánffy (p. 149), the apprentice became indebted to his mentor who schooled him informally in the art of an intercultural tradition from Transylvania, and facilitated his further research in Strasbourg (pp. 150-151).

Professor Lajos Balázs is labelled in article ten as a man-stile (Ro., *om-pârleaz*) due the research he conducted in Romanian-Hungarian studies in Miercurea Ciuc where he founded the Department of Socio-Human Sciences (p. 155). Here, at Sapientia University, his monographs on rites of passage and eroticism in the village of Sândominic (Csíkszentdomokos) Harghita County afforded him a certain deep understanding of the ways of the world (p. 156).

The section ends with an interview in which Eginald Schlattner talks about the Romanian-Hungarian dialogue and the departure of Transylvanian Saxons. As representative of a minority that barely still exists in Romania, he was also the star of almost 50 documentary films in Europe, in which he was asked about the exodus of Transylvanian Saxons to Germany in 1990. An answer to the question may as well be the topic of a novel, the bottom line being that with each new regime, a part of self-government was lost (pp. 163-164). A *Doctor honoris causa* of Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, his speech on Romanian-Hungarian relations was censored (pp. 168-169), despite his diplomatic arguments advocating that a premise for reconciliation would be that each side have a genuine memory of what happened, without ideological or excessively patriotic incentives; not to mention that each should admit that it is not better than the other (p. 172).

The last section contains a series of reviews relevant to the field: to Hubert Rossel's, *Transylvanie. Les églises fortifiées du pays des Sicules*, pref. by Violeta Barbu, Kinga Tüdős, János Gyöngyössy (2015) in which V. Trifescu admits he much cherishes the Székely culture in Romania, and expresses his gratitude for the author who identified several types of churches in the land (p. 176)

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[3] Jean-Noël Grandhomme, *1914-1919: les combattants alsaciens-lorrains entre deux fidélités? Choix individuels et comportements collectifs*, textes réunis par Élisabeth Clementz, *Autorité, liberté, contrainte en Alsace. Regards sur l'histoire d'Alsace (XIe-XXIe siècles)* (s. l. [Nancy], Éditions Place Stanislas, 2010), 259-273.

looking forward to the Romanian and Hungarian translations (p. 177). In the review on Ionuţ Codrea's *Vechea biserică parohială a Devei* (*The Old Parish Church of Deva*), foreword by Ioachim Lazăr (2010), he deplores the situation of research in Romanian historiography on medieval Transylvanian art (p. 178), saluting the initiative of the author to account for a monument that is no longer in place and belonged to the Hungarian and Székely community of Deva (p. 179). Timea Lelik, Claudiu Călin and Maria Radna's *Mică monografie istorică şi artistică a bazilicii papale şi a complexului monastic* (*Short Historical and Artistic Monograph of the Papal Basilica and the Monastic Complex*), foreword by Martin Roos and Andreas Reinholz (2011) is considered by V. Trifescu a premiere for the subfield in Romanian historiography (p. 186), a starting point in the respective Romanian bibliography (p. 187). Anca Elisabeta Tatay's *Tradiţie şi inovaţie în tehnica şi arta ilustraţiei cărţii româneşti tipărite la Buda (1780-1830)* (*Tradition and Innovation in the Technique and Art of Romanian Book Illustration Printed in Buda (1780-1830)*) (2010) continues the author's research in the field of engraving started in 2007 (p. 193). She emphasised the role of Buda as a printing centre and allowed specialists to have a clearer idea on the circulation of artistic models in the Central European and Romanian world (p. 194). In glosses on the book *Influenţa limbii maghiare asupra limbii române. Perioada veche* (*The Influence of the Hungarian language on the Romanian language. The Old Period*) (2014) by Enikő Pál, V. Trifescu details its benefits for Romanian and Hungarian linguists (p. 197). The author helps us better understand these languages and their shared history due to her openness to alterity (p. 200). Susana-Monica Tapodi's *Itinerare textuale. Studii şi eseuri de istoria culturii şi de literatura comparată* (*Textual Itineraries. Studies and Essays on the History of Culture and Comparative Literature*) (2017) pertains to a long intellectual and intercultural Transylvanian tradition (p. 210) giving a kaleidoscopic perspective on countless Hungarian cultural and literary relations to alterity (p. 211). Last but not least, Felician Pop's *Imaginea românilor în operele scriitorilor maghiari* (*The Image of Romanians in the Works of Hungarian Writers*), prefaced by George Achim (2019) is, in V. Trifescu's opinion, a game of mirrors for the author by which he understands his own ethno-cultural identity (p. 216).

To conclude, V. Trifescu's book is very useful for whoever is interested in the topic of literary relations between nationalities, border regions, interculturalism and alterity, to name but a few.

BOOK REVIEW

Laurențiu Vlad (coord.), *Percepții ale „Europei" și europenității în spațiul public românesc al secolelor XVIII-XXI (istorii, imagini, idei)* **[***Perceptions of "Europe" and Europeanness in the Romanian public space of the 18th-21st centuries (histories, images, ideas)***], Cetatea de Scaun, Târgoviște / Institutul European, Iași, 2024, 434 p.**

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The European continent is an undeniable reference point for the international arena. It has a constant responsibility to defend and promote, both at home and abroad, fundamental values such as unity, diversity, respect for the rule of law and human rights, and the preservation of social standards in a market economy. Europe is a role model for other regions around the world, and this image of success has been built up over time and with considerable effort. Today, Europe has to fight with all forces and resources at its disposal to protect this image and has the task of finding the best solutions to ensure the security of its citizens without, however, infringing upon their freedoms. It is a huge challenge, but if it succeeds, Europe will continue to be appreciated and will continue to be a beacon for all other continents.

The volume *Perceptions of "Europe" and Europeanness in the Romanian public space of the 18th-21st centuries (histories, images, ideas)* is an extremely thorough research on the idea of "Europe" and the way it is reflected in the Romanian cultural space. It is an extraordinary scientific endeavour in which its coordinator, Laurențiu Vlad, aims to bring together older and newer reflections on the perception of Romanians' belonging to the European continent. The analysis is built both through synthesis studies, such as those related to the influences of the French/Western model in the cultural and political space of the Romanian Principalities at the end of the 18th century and in the first part of the 19th century, the dynamics of regional alliances in inter-war Europe and the emergence of new concepts such as Euro-Atlantism, etc., but also through case studies: the analysis of articles in magazines such as *Ideea Europeană* or *Gazeta de Vest*, the contribution of Romanian Television during communism or the perception of some local priests on the relationship between the European Union and the LGBTQIA+ community.

In the four sections of the volume, several topics are dealt with that can be included in a historiography started in the 1960-1970s by experts and historians such as Alexandru Duțu, Adrian Marino or Vlad Georgescu. The analysis is consistent, with very well constructed arguments. This is to the authors' and the coordinator's merit, who impeccably structures the stages from the 19th century to the post-communist situation. There are also some limitations, of which the coordinator of the volume is aware, such as the inventory of anti-European attitudes in the 20th century, but in the preamble Laurențiu Vlad tries to bring some examples from the 19th century to this topic as well.

Part I is opened by the contribution of Toader Nicoară who presents the European (French) models and values in the Danube Principalities between 1750-1830. He captures the beginnings, not very coherent and arising from less clear intentions, but which undoubtedly contributed to the emergence of attitudes and behaviours influenced by French culture and civilization. Both the French language and the political model of this nation represented the best options for Moldavian society, and were visible in the process of modernization of the Principality.

In the next chapter, Alexandru Florin Platon discusses Romanians and Europe in the early 19th century from the perspective of the anthropology of emotion. This approach reflects a general framework of how the European model contributed to the "civilization" of Romanian society. If in the case of clothing styles, the changes are obvious, in terms of behaviour, the whole modernization process was slower. The experience of Dinicu Golescu, who is marked by some European landscapes, and that of Ion Codru-Drăgușanu later on, support the arguments that change was underway.

In the third chapter of this first part, Sorin Mitu, presents how Romanians in Transylvania perceived European values in the first half of the 19th century. The writings of the authors Simion Bărnuțiu and Ion Codru-Drăgușanu are an extraordinary reference to emphasize the importance and European influence on the Principalities. Simion Bărnuțiu highlights the agriculture, trade and

economy of the European continent, while Ion Codru-Drăguşanu emphasizes more the elements of civilization, which give rise to some rivalries and brings to the forefront comparisons between the origins of peoples, such as those of Latin and Germanic origin.

The last contribution in this part belongs to Cornel Sigmirean, who presents the image and impressions of Romanian students from Transylvania about European university towns in the second half of the 19th and early 20th century. One of the greatest European influences is undoubtedly the university environment. Young Romanians studying in Western countries were transforming their perception on the way of life and a detachment from the places where they were born was taking shape. Through the education and culture acquired there, they were able to contribute to the nation's rise in later difficult times, such as war.

Part II brings together five chapters on perceptions of the idea of Europe in the interwar period. Aura-Carmen Slate talks in her opening chapter about the journal *Ideea Europeană* and its contribution to interwar Romanian culture. The study includes several articles from this journal, which aim to present as complete as possible a picture of the European project in the interwar period. The debate on the integration of the national culture into the European one was one of the most significant challenges for the political elites of the time. Moreover, the journal itself is a cultural and political manifesto, which contributed decisively to the promotion of European ideas in Romanian society.

In the following chapter, Simion Costea identifies some aspects of the idea of Europe in school textbooks on world history in inter-war Romania. In these textbooks, Europe is presented in a redundant way, as a geographical and political structure, a landmark of unity in diversity, a space where conflicts between states are based on certain interests, which bind them into a system. The most important objective is to build a balance and an order to end these rivalries.

Ovidiu Pecican tackles the subject of medieval Europe in the writings of Nicolae Iorga. In his historical approach, Nicolae Iorga reconstructs with great meticulousness and erudition, Europe's survival in the face of the barbarian invasions of the Middle Ages. Through the numerous citations presented, Ovidiu Pecican aims and succeeds in providing us with a complex overview of the subject and also shows us how creative and diverse the work of the great Romanian historian is.

In the fourth chapter, Mihai Sebe presents Romanian perspectives on regional construction projects in interwar Europe. The Romanian elites of the interwar period were very interested in the projects of regional and continental organization of that time. Both economically, politically and in terms of security, the elites were aware of the less favourable position of the Principalities and tried to find the best approaches to enhance national interests.

At the end of this part, Alina Stoica, gives an analysis of the European echoes in the Romanian interwar press in Crişana, concerning the issue of collective security in the years 1930-1931 in the pages of *Gazeta de Vest*. The elites of Bihor were very receptive to and active in the political, economic and cultural actions of Europe. As a result of this research, concrete elements are drawn from the articles in the *Gaze de l'Ouest* (Little Deal, Hitler-era elements, Spain and the failure of collective security, etc.) that concern the security of the European continent.

In Part III, we can observe the chronological evolution of the subject towards the years 1940-1980. In this sense, Radu Albu Comănescu talks about the Europeanist activity in Romanian exile from the perspective of George Ciorănescu and Grigore Gafencu. The author of the chapter does not propose a comparison of the two, but rather an inventory of their ideas showing Romania's unquestioning participation in European initiatives, which began in the 1950s with the creation of the Economic Community of Coal and Steel.

In the following chapter, Cristina Preutu, gives a picture of Romania in the context of the Cold War and the way in which European security was perceived. The author presents the main political and economic elements that positioned Romania in the European direction, as well as the continuation of the actions that preserved the cultural connection with the old continent. They analysed Romania's foreign policy directions and the way in which the government in Bucharest has positioned itself in the face of two international challenges - European security and Eurocommunism.

Next, Silvia-Cristina Baumgarten discusses the role of Western influences in Romanian Television programs during the communist period. The comparative and descriptive analysis on the basis of the Romanian Television Archive as well as the National Archives of Romania is very meticulously constructed. Romanian Television's connection with the West during communism, especially in the 1960s and 1970s, greatly influenced the program schedule and helped to increase the quality of the broadcasts. As the author concludes, its development was spectacular, with numerous

programs, documentaries, films and series that were highly appreciated by the public. However, as a result of the nationalism promoted by the communist leader Nicolae Ceaușescu, Romanian television also suffered, going into relative decline from the second half of the 1970s.

Laurențiu Vlad adds to the perspectives already presented a dimension of individual contributions to this historiography of the idea of Europe, namely those of Adrian Marino, Alexandru Duțu and Vlad Georgescu. As Laurențiu Vlad points out, these three personalities contributed to the revival of the autochthonous civilization which was in a period of economic, social and political regression due to the Phanariotes' reigns. Adrian Marino and Alexandru Duțu put more emphasis on the cultural component of Europe's image, while Vlad Georgescu was more interested in the political and economic aspects. If Adrian Marino focused more on the "inferiority complex" in its practical form (the development gap between the West and Romanian Principalities), Alexandru Duțu goes along a more nuanced line of cultural difference, i.e. recognizing the superiority of the West from a material but not from a spiritual perspective.

The last contribution in this part belongs to Mihaela Grancea and highlights how Romanian cinema in the 1970s-1980s incorporates some Western values. The best-known films of the period are analysed. Some of them were successful after the fall of communism, such as *Mihai Viteazul*. As well as films inspired by history, there are also topical films - comedies, children's and teen movies, such as: *Toate pânzele sus*, *Moromeții* or *Noiembrie, ultimul bal*.

Part IV concludes the chronological arc with an analysis of the post-communist period. Ruxandra Ivan presents the implications of the concept of "Euro-Atlantism". As the author points out, the idea of Europe has had a great capacity to mobilize people, and this is due to cultural and political tradition. Three temporal levels of Euro-Atlantism are identified. These overlap with the foreign policy objectives of the post-communist period, that of ensuring national security and a return to the West. Joining NATO and the European Union was the pragmatic, concrete expression of the fulfilment of these objectives.

In the second chapter, Adrian Cioroianu deals with the influence of the idea of Europe during the 1990s. He emphasizes that the idea of Europe is assimilated to freedom, and that the 1990s represent a period of transition, not exactly a smooth one, because the reminiscences of the communist period could not be immediately removed. There are certain elements that persist in people's behaviour (ethnocentrism, neglect of certain categories of rights, suspicion of the direction in which the country is heading), but change is a process, often a long one, requiring many sacrifices. Romania is going through this process and is gradually embarking on the European and Western paths.

Cristina Maria Dogot, in the third chapter, brings to attention the subject of post-communist populist movements in Romania and their influence on the EU membership. Populist parties have been numerous and have mobilized over time as a result of events or crises. With the accession to the European Union, a new level of decision making emerges. Against the background of public discontent, there have always been leaders who saw an opportunity to promote various messages. Distrust of the EU can be separated into two distinct categories: euro-realism and euroscepticism. Fortunately, as the author notes, the first category is the most vocal in Romania. However, the decline of real interest in Romania's concrete problems, often coupled with a lack of education and knowledge of European values and practices, is worrying.

Finally, Sergiu Mișcoiu, Sergiu Gherghina and Dragoș Șamșudean conclude this part with a chapter dedicated to the European Union and sexual minorities, namely an analysis of the perception of Orthodox priests in Romania regarding this relationship. As a research method, semi-structured interviews were used, in which Orthodox priests expressed their opinion about the European Union and the rules and regulations it imposes on homosexual relations.

From a methodological point of view, this collective volume meets the standards of scientific research of the highest level. It brings together the contributions of several professors and experts in the field, who teach at prestigious universities. I would also like to point out that the study is intended for both researchers and those who are passionate about the field and that the detailed presentation of each aspect and the clarity of the message conveyed are also strong arguments for recommending this volume.

BOOK REVIEW

Dana Duma, Stephan Krause, Anke Pfeifer (eds.), *Klassiker des rumänischen Films [Classics of Romanian cinema]*, **Marburg, Schüren Verlag, 2024, 228 p.**

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Dana Duma, Stephan Krause and Anke Pfeifer have coordinated the volume dedicated to the Romanian cinema, published in 2024 in Marburg by Schüren Publishing House. The collaboration of the three is an international endeavour between the University of Bucharest, the Leibniz-Institut für Geschichte und Kultur des östlichen Europa in Leipzig and the University of Zürich, respectively, of three scholars in the field of Eastern European cinema, dedicated also to conceptualizing the theoretical aspects of cinema history. This volume is the sixth in a whole series published by the same publisher, *Klassiker des osteuropäischen Films*. The printing of a history of Romanian cinema follows the publication of histories of Polish, Czech, Slovak, Hungarian, Slovak, Hungarian and Russian, namely Soviet cinema. In addition to the contributions of the editors, the volume contains 22 other contributions by an array of specialists in the field, from Romania, Eastern and Central Europe, thus totalling 25 portraits of a selection of Romanian films. The authors who contribute to this volume are not only from the field of cinema, but also philologists, literary critics, historians, art historians, researchers and university professors. It should also be emphasized that the German written volume is aimed at a German-speaking audience, and the authors of the articles are not only Romanians, thus the editors successfully managing to publish a well-balanced volume with international contributors.

Chronologically, the films presented in the pages of the volume were released between 1912 and 2018. In the context of the historical events that took place in Romania in more than a century, the editors and authors have treated films representative of periods of great historical changes, starting with the War of Independence in 1877, continuing with films released during the years of the Second World War, emblematic films of the communist period and post-communist decades, namely the 1990s, 2000s and 2010. Most of the latter have achieved international success and recognition, either being released within established European film festivals or receiving major awards such as *the Golden Bear* (Berlin), *Palme d'Or* (Cannes), *Jury Prize* at the Locarno Film Festival or Karlovy Vary.

Historical films or those that revive classics of Romanian literature were, of course, produced during the communist period, most of them being a reflexion of that era. The great Romanian film productions, the historical *blockbusters*, have not been of interest to the movie people of the last three decades, history being shown on the big screens rather from the perspective of micro-histories, of personal dramas interwoven with historical events.

The movie portraits comprised within this volume are *Independența României. Războiul româno-ruso-turc 1877* (1912), *O noapte furtunoasă* (1943), *La moara cu noroc* (1956), *S-a furat o bombă* (1961), *Pădurea spânzuraților* (1964), *Reconstituirea* (1969/70), *Mihai Viteazu* (1970), *Apa ca un bivol negru* (1970), *100 de lei* (1973), *Proba de microfon* (1979), *O lacrimă de fată* (1980), *Secvențe* (1982), *Moromeții* (1986), *È periculoso sporgersi* (1993), *Moartea domnului Lăzărescu* (2004), *Hîrtia va fi albastră* (2006), *A fost sau n-a fost?* (2006), *California Dreamin'* (nesfârșit) (2006), *4 luni, 3 săptămâni și 2 zile* (2007), *Morgen* (2009), *Crulic – drumul spre dincolo* (2011), *Poziția copilului* (2012), *Aferim!* (2015), *Nu mă atinge-mă – Touch me not* (2018).

The manner of their presentation, respectively the portrait of each movie is not only addressed to specialists in the field or filmmakers, but aims to educate the taste of the general public. The texts are original, not having been published in other works, and the focus of the articles is not only on the historical aspect or the description of the films, but also on their impact within the Romanian social sphere.

The editors themselves argue in favour of this selection of Romanian films through the need to recount the energy of Romanian cinema, its aesthetics, but also to capture the social, political and cultural upheavals that contributed not only to the production of the films, but also to their scripts. At

the same time, they emphasize from the introduction that they did not intend in any way to highlight these film productions as pillars of a canon of the Romanian film, nor did the authors intend for each portrait to be apologetic in any kind.

In all these portraits we would like to highlight some essential aspects for the history of the Romanian cinema. We would like to start by emphasizing the importance and place of Ion Popescu-Gopo (*S-a furat o bombă*) in the historical context of the production of Romanian art films. His main activity was in the field of animation, fairy-tale and science-fiction films. For decades his name was the only Romanian one in international film encyclopaedias. His short-animated film, *Scurtă istorie* (1956), was the first Romanian production to win a prize at an international film festival, and was awarded the prestigious *Palme d'Or* in Cannes.

Another aspect to be mentioned regarding the way in which this volume was conceived is the desire of the editors and authors to bring to light the *New Romanian Cinema* and the specific working methods of the productions that fall within this new cinematographic wave, starting from methods such as *self-reflectivity*, to new ways of rendering the director's ideas, but also to the use of new technical tools, such as hand-held cameras, which boost the attractiveness of the productions. Among the films of *the New Romanian Cinema* presented in this volume, not few of them have received international recognition, either the work of their directors or cast members. In this respect, we would like to mention films such as *Nu mă atinge-mă – Touch me not, Poziția copilului*, *4 luni, 3 săptămâni și 2 zile*, *Moartea domnului Lăzărescu*. In the *Introduction,* the editors do not forget to mention other post-communist cinematographic productions that enjoyed international acclaim and were not covered in this volume.

In conclusion, we would like to highlight the great merit of this volume written in German of giving recognition to the Romanian cinema with a tradition of more than a hundred years, a tradition that has contributed essentially to the rich cinematographic production of the last three decades, awarded, appreciated and experienced by both the general public and by specialists, thus cementing its place in the East-European context and beyond.